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OR,
The Kentucky Tenderfoot's
First Trail.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG ADVENTURER.

"SAY, Charlie, how would you like to go out to the Wild West with me?"

"And scalp Indians, uncle, and become a great scout?"

"Well, I don't know about the scalping Indian business, Charlie; but I am going to the far West to hunt up a fortune, and if you wish to go I'll see if they will let you do so."

"Oh! how glad I would be, uncle! and I believe I could make my fortune, too."

But, the uncle's arguments and urging were unavailing, for a prompt and decided refusal

"SEE! BOY GOT SIOUX SCALP! UGH!" AND THERE, INDEED, WAS CHARLIE EMMETT.

followed his request to take little Charlie Emmett* with him on what was considered a Quixotic expedition into the great western wilderness.

Charlie's home was in Kentucky, and he had become, like most Southern boys, a good rider, a fine shot, and a fearless fellow.

His home was a happy one, but his beau ideal of manhood was his uncle, a bachelor, who had drifted about the world since his youth, becoming considerable of a hero, and, at stated times, visiting his kindred in their charming home.

His stories of adventures fired the heart of Charlie Emmett to go through the same scenes of danger and daring.

He had already killed a bear, though only in his thirteenth year; had saved the lives of two of his boyhood companions, who would have been drowned but for the brave lad's springing in and saving them.

He had made a hero of himself before the eyes of the children of the village school by boldly telling the teacher to thrash him instead of a little crippled boy who had been caught in some mischief.

The teacher had taken him at his word, and such a whipping as he gave him made the scholars cry out in alarm; but Charlie bore it without a word, though deadly pale under the punishment; and when he went home, bleeding under the blows, the teacher, in the meanness of his nature, had given the crippled boy a terrible flogging also, thus breaking his compact with the chivalric youth who had offered himself as a sacrifice.

"I'll even up on him for that, see if I don't," had been Charlie's threat when he heard what had followed his departure.

It was several days after this that his uncle had suggested taking him West with him, and the refusal to allow him to go was a bitter blow to the eager lad.

His uncle, to smooth matters over, had presented him with a fine horse, saddle, bridle, rifle and belt of arms, and when he departed said to him:

"Good-by, Charlie! If the world goes hard with you, look me up. Here are two twenty-dollar gold pieces. Put them away until you need them."

The uncle departed, and Charlie's heart was sad.

He went to school, but his thoughts were not upon his books, and so he was called up for punishment.

"I think you ought to let me off, sir," said the boy.

"Why, you young scamp?"

"You whipped me the other day when I did nothing, and punished Bennie Hallowell, too."

"And I'll punish you now more severely for your impudence."

"I am in your power, Mr. Stevens."

Then the teacher began his punishment, and severe indeed it was.

The children wondered, but Charlie uttered no outcry of pain.

On Sunday Charlie went out for a walk all alone. He carried with him a saw, concealed under his coat, and made his way to a brook, spanned by a footbridge which consisted of a long log, with a rail fastened along it by up-roots.

Charlie went to where a boat was tied, got in and rowed out under the log.

Then he made his boat fast, and taking out his saw set to work with a will.

He sawed away for an hour or more and felt satisfied with his work.

In the center of the stream a stake had been driven and upon this the two logs forming the bridge rested. This stake was sawed through and the ends rested just on the edge of each other.

Around the upper one Charlie tied a slender rope, and then rowed away into the overhanging bushes, forty feet above, made his boat fast and waited.

Across the stream was a little cottage—the home of the teacher. He had there his horse, cow, chickens and pigs, and being an old bachelor, had an old negro to do his work.

It was Sunday and the teacher, dressed in his best suit, had gone over to the village church.

He was returning home, anticipating the fine dinner that old Ned had ready for him, when he reached the footbridge.

He did not detect Charlie Emmett's work, but walked boldly out to the center, his hand slipping along the rail, when, suddenly, the water was stirred as the sunken rope was hauled tight, the support was jerked out, and with a crash and a

splash the bridge fell, and Mr. Stevens was sent floundering into the water.

He could not swim a stroke, and went down like a stone; but when he arose he was grasped by a strong hand and told to hold on while the boat was rowed ashore.

The teacher obeyed, for he was terribly alarmed, and Charlie pulled the skiff near the shore, when he said:

"Now you are safe, Mr. Stevens, and I am even for the licking you gave crippled Bennie Hallowell and me."

He rowed away as he spoke, landed on the other shore and going home confessed to his parents what he had done.

The result was more punishment, and learning that the teacher intended to half kill him, he mounted his horse one night, took the money his uncle had given him, and what he had saved up, and with his weapons and a saddle-bag of clothing, started out to seek adventure and fortune in the wild West—the paradise of his day-dreams—the true land of the free and home of the brave.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TRACK.

CHARLIE had gained a start, should he be pursued, by asking to go, as he often did, to remain over night with Bennie Hallowell the crippled boy.

He had left home early, and his weapons and traps had been carried to a hiding-place previously.

He knew that his uncle had gone to Louisville, to there take the boat for St. Louis, and thence on up the Missouri River into Nebraska.

Charlie knew that they would track him to Louisville, if he went that way; so he decided to ride to St. Louis, hoping there to intercept his uncle, who, he knew, was no hasty traveler.

He rode steadily through the night, camping at dawn, as he dared not go to any farm-house for fear of being detected as a runaway.

He knew that he would not be expected home before the next evening, as it was supposed he would go to school with Bennie Hallowell for the day.

Even then when he did not come they might not send after him, supposing he had remained a second night, though without permission.

This was the case, and when Charlie's absence was at length discovered, or rather, that he did not return the second night, a servant was sent over to the Hallowells' to fetch him home.

The servant reported that Charlie had not been there at all; and more—that he had not been at school.

Bennie was in the secret, but wild horses could never have dragged that secret from him.

A search revealed that he had taken with him his weapons, some clothing and the saddle-bags, with a couple of blankets, an India-rubber one and some provisions.

Search was at once made, but with the start of forty-eight hours it was not easy to discover which way he had gone.

The people living along every road were questioned, but Charlie had traveled at night, and drawing off the highway when he saw any one approaching had avoided meeting a single person.

The first time he had halted to rest he had camped, and remained hidden all that day, starting again at night, showing remarkable cleverness in thus eluding pursuit, a cleverness that was revealed in his after life, saving him from death many a time, and saving others too.

As Charlie had surmised, it was supposed he had gone straight to Louisville, to overtake his Uncle Emmett; so one of the searchers went to Louisville, and Mr. Emmett was found just ready to go by steamer to St. Louis.

He had seen nothing of the boy, and as the steamer started down-stream while the one looking for Charlie was there, it was conclusive proof that the runaway did not go away with his uncle.

He was, consequently, given up as gone at least, for the time being, from home, though it was hoped, as soon as he got out of funds he would return, and as he was pretty well able to look after himself, not much real anxiety was felt regarding him or his safety.

Meanwhile Charlie went along on the even tenor of his way. He was a splendid horseman, young as he was, and knew just what his horse could stand.

The bag of oats he had brought from home, and the grass about his well-chosen camping-places, were all the food his horse needed for three days, while his own provisions lasted as long.

Traveling by night he had proceeded over a

hundred miles from home when he went into camp for the third time.

He decided that he was then far enough away to risk daylight travel thereafter, and wanted to learn just where he was, for sign-boards were not always to be found, and studying one at cross-roads by the aid of a match had thus far been his only guide.

So he camped until noon, ate up his last supply of food, and gave the last oats to his horse.

He had slept serenely from dawn until noon, and felt fully refreshed. Therefore, after his dinner, he again mounted and rode on his way.

At night he halted at a large farm-house and was made welcome. He told a straight story, to the effect that he was going to St. Louis to join his uncle, who was to take him to the far West with him.

When asked about his being allowed to leave home, he replied:

"No, they didn't wish me to leave home; but then, I wish to make my way in the world without help, and the horse is my own—given to me by my uncle."

He enjoyed his night's rest, was not allowed to pay for his lodging, and went upon his way rejoicing. At another hospitable house where he stopped he was told to remain over Sunday and go to church with the family, which he did, and thus his horse and himself got a rest of thirty-six hours.

Again he started on his way, and so continued, sparing his horse all he could, yet anxious to reach St. Louis and head off his uncle.

After two weeks' travel he rode into St. Louis one night, and oh! how lonesome he felt in the large city!

But he sought a tavern, put up his horse, got a room for himself, and bright and early the next morning, he went out upon the search for his uncle, visiting all the hotels in the city—which was not as large as it is now.

At last he found where his uncle had stopped, and was told that had left with a party of others the day before, going up the Missouri River to Omaha.

It was a severe blow to the young wanderer; but, after his first grief was over, he said firmly and pluckily:

"I will not be beaten! I will follow him."

CHAPTER III.

A BOY'S STRATEGY.

CHARLIE EMMETT rallied from the shock of failing to overtake his uncle at St. Louis, as soon as he had thought the situation over.

A young philosopher, he had argued:

"Now, uncle certainly would have sent me back home again, for I would have told him the truth about my leaving. He would not wish me to go with him without permission, so I would have been put on a steamboat and made to return."

"It really was lucky to find him gone, for when I get to Omaha he won't send me back so far; but for fear he might, I'll take good care to join him after he has left there; then he can't get rid of me."

"Let me see: I must write home from here, saying I am going to join Uncle Emmett, and am all right, but left because I didn't wish to be whipped at school, and home, too, because I got even with Teacher Stevens."

"I've heard uncle say he could buy single little horses at Omaha for fifty dollars, and I've got just twenty-six dollars now, and as the steamboat fare is twelve dollars even for me, and as I want to get what uncle calls a prairie outfit in Omaha, I will have to sell my good horse, Reindeer. He is worth a couple of hundred at home, so I'll see what he'll bring here."

With this intention the Kentucky lad sauntered out in search of a horse-dealer.

He easily found one, but the man would not buy from a boy, so the shrewd boy moved to the tavern where his uncle had put up.

He had already told the landlord who he was, and, struck with the honest-faced youth, and pleased to know that he was boldly going to follow his uncle, he told him he would buy his horse for two hundred dollars, and throw in his board-bill to boot.

Charlie had hinted to him that he had just written home, and as he had money, and seemed so honest, the landlord had not the remotest idea that he was a runaway.

A steamboat was to leave for the upper Missouri in three days, and Charlie passed the time in getting an "outfit," and seeing the sights of the great city.

He bought ammunition enough to stand a

* Charles Emmett, a noted Indian-fighter, guide interpreter and scout of the plains.

siege, invested in another revolver and a bowie-knife, also a second india-rubber blanket, a suit of buckskins which he had made up, a suit of corduroys, top-boots, a slouch hat, a blanket overcoat, spurs, a frying-pan, coffeepot and canteen.

In fact, Charlie's outfit cost him, with his range saddle, bridle and lariat, for he discarded the boy's saddle he had ridden from home, a clear one hundred dollars.

He paid for his passage up the river, counted his cash and finding that he was yet rich enough to buy a good horse and provisions for some time to come, he packed his traps and was ready for the, to him, momentous voyage.

He had written his letter home and mailed it just before leaving the hotel, his kindhearted landlord accompanying him to the boat and introducing him as:

"Charlie, Captain Emmett's nephew, who goes to join him in Omaha, so look out for him."

Charlie had felt the tears come into his eyes, when he had parted with Reindeer, for it was the breaking of the last link that bound him to home, and he had also parted with his saddle and bridle with regret.

But he had argued:

"They would think me what uncle calls a tenderfoot, if I carried such a saddle and bridle West."

When the good landlord told him good-by, Charlie choked up again, but the excitement of departure soon made him feel all right, and the captain told him to go up in the pilot-house and make himself at home.

The kindness of the pilot, the scenery, a good supper and a state-room all to himself made Charlie feel in a good humor with himself and the world in general and he slept as he expressed it to the pilot, "like a top," whatever that style of sleeping may be.

He spent most of his time, when not eating and sleeping, in the pilot-house, read aloud to the pilots a thrilling story of border life and simply enjoyed the trip to his heart's content.

He had heard so much of Omaha that he was sadly disappointed to find it at that time but a scattering settlement around a fort, an advance post as it were across the river from Council Bluffs, a starting point for emigrants to go still further out into the land of the setting sun.

He was advised by the pilot not to go to the taverns, which were full of rough men, but to look up a boarding-house, if he could not find his uncle.

So Charlie set out upon the search for his uncle, and discovered that he had gone with a train of hunters that had pulled out for posts to trade with the Indians.

He, therefore, hunted up a boarding-house, and found a place with a kind-hearted widow, who gave him poor food, but lots of good advice, among which was to take the next steamboat down the river home, for he would come to grief out in that wild land.

But Charlie had seen emigrant children about in the camps, and among them mere infants, so he said:

"If the babies can stand it out here, Mrs. Collins, I guess I can."

In searching for his horse, Charlie showed that he was not to be cheated, even by border roughs, for he knew a horse from hoof to ear, and he had a correct idea of the price of a good animal out there, so he took his time, picked out the horse he wanted, and paid for him just sixty-five dollars, to soon find out that the beast was worth even more.

To overtake the train seemed to Charlie quite an easy thing to do, but he was before long convinced that it was a very dangerous undertaking—very different from riding along through Kentucky and Missouri.

He thought it best, therefore, to secure a guide; and did so, but it was one whom he had to admit he was not fond of as his companion.

But Limber Joe, for such was his name, or the one he answered to, was said to be a reliable fellow, and consented to undertake to overhaul the train with Charlie for the sum of thirty dollars and what he called his "feed" there and back.

The bargain was made, and Charlie was to start under Limber Joe's guidance on the following morning, taking his first lesson in frontier trailering and border life.

He counted his cash, after buying his horse and provisions, and paying his board, and found that he yet had the sum he had started from home with, and was the possessor of a horse even better than Reindeer, for the work in view, and a complete outfit.

So before dawn Limber Joe and his young charge started upon the trail of the fur-traders.

CHAPTER IV.

LIMBER JOE.

LIMBER JOE deserved his name. He was over six feet in height, slender as a bean-pole, and yet as wiry as a cat, and as agile.

He was a man of giant strength, had a record as a man "on the shoot," and was one to awe all whom he came in contact with.

He had been the guide of a train to Denver, another to Salt Lake, and was said to know the country perfectly from the Missouri to the Rocky Mountains.

If he had other name than Limber Joe, he disowned it, for reasons he never explained.

His face was cadaverous and covered with a crop of coarse red beard, while his unkempt hair hung down to his waist.

His dress was a cross between a cowboy's and Indian's, and very shabby at that; but his horse was one of the best, his saddle and bridle of the best manufacture, and his arms were the latest patents and kept as bright as dollars.

He had told Charlie it was best to leave before dawn and camp on the trail for breakfast, and the boy had obeyed his instructions, for it was an hour before daybreak when they rode out of the then settlement of Omaha.

The guide pushed along on what he said was the trail the fur-traders had taken, and when day dawned Charlie discovered that Limber Joe knew what he was about, for they had been following along a well-marked trail.

"Ten wagons," said Limber Joe, laconically.

"How can you tell that?"

"By the tracks."

"It's perfectly plain."

"Six of them have six mules each, then there are four with four horses, and an ambulance with two."

"There are, besides the drivers, a dozen men on horseback."

Charlie was astounded, to see Limber Joe simply read all this from gazing at the ground.

But the guide did not tell him that he had seen the train pull out of Omaha, and knew just what composed it.

They camped soon after sunrise, and Limber Joe showed Charlie just how to stake the horses out, gathered wood and seemed to take pleasure in teaching him how to build a camp-fire and cook breakfast.

The guide proved himself an excellent cook, and by no means stingy with Charlie's provisions.

He had shot an antelope and showed him how to get the choice cuts, and broiled some bacon crisp to eat with the juicy steaks.

He put on the coffee to boil, got out a loaf of bread, and roasted some potatoes in the ashes, so that the breakfast was a most tempting one.

He told Charlie to wash the tin plates, forks, knives, coffeepot and fryingpan, and gave him advice about it, while he leant against a tree and smoked his pipe, an enjoyment which the boy declined to join him in.

Then Charlie was told to saddle the horses, so he could learn how, thoroughly, to pack up the breakfast traps, and they were ready for the trail.

Limber Joe was very thorough in showing him how to trail, and telling him of prairie "signs," and all that was instructive to him.

A halt was made at noon, and again just before sunset, when they went into camp for the night.

For fear of Indians and prowling whites, Limber Joe said, he had sought a camp some distance off the trail.

Then it was that Charlie discovered that the guide was willing to teach him in anything where there was work to be done.

He had him build the fire, after unsaddling both horses and staking them out.

Then he got out the traps for camping, spread the blankets, cooked supper, and all the while the guide serenely smoked his pipe.

But he became very energetic when Charlie announced supper.

He took a long pull at a flask, which he said contained:

"Medicine for chills."

Charlie had kept his eyes as wide open as it was possible for them to be, and he had seen the guide leave a slip of paper at the breakfast and noonday camps.

Though his curiosity was excited he did not even pretend to see it.

Again he saw him, when they turned off the trail to hunt the camp for the night, leave a slip of paper in the end of a stick, right in the center of the trail.

"I wonder if I can't kill some game for break-

fast," said Charlie, after supper, as there was yet half an hour of daylight.

"Yer'll git lost, leetle pard," grumbled Limber Joe.

"No, I won't go far."

"Don't yer go, I tell yer, fer I knows my biz," was the response.

So Charlie obeyed, or appeared to, for he set about clearing up the things, while the guide sunk to sleep most serenely, his pipe in his lips.

The moment Charlie saw this he glided away, and after a walk of several hundred rods, came to the spot where they had left the trail.

There was the stick, split in the end, and the paper stuck in it.

Taking the latter Charlie read:

"Camped quarter of a mile away. Wait here fer me."

"I'll come when he gets ter sleep, and then—"

The sentence was unfinished, and Charlie wondered as he read it.

He did not like his guide.

He was keeping something from him, that was certain, and this slip of paper meant surely that some one was following them.

He had seen his guide talking to a most villainous looking fellow the night before, and his suspicion was aroused at once, but what he had to fear he was not quite sure of.

"I'll not go to sleep, Mr. Limber Joe," he muttered as he replaced the paper and hastened away.

He had just entered the thicket, when something impelled him to look back down the trail.

As he did so a horseman rode into sight.

It was the same man whom Charlie had seen Limber Joe talking to the night before in Omaha.

CHAPTER V.

IN PERIL.

BACK to the camp went the boy, and he at once changed the situation of his sleeping place.

He got over in a little water-wash, sheltered by some stunted pines, and there spread his bed.

He was careful in spreading it, for one who did not, as he had said, go to sleep.

The fire blazed up cheerily, and Limber Joe awoke with a loud cry.

He had evidently had a bad dream, for he grasped his revolver and gazed about him like a man who had been face to face with some dread scene.

"Boy, why hain't yer gone ter bed?" he asked angrily, as he saw Charlie spreading his bed.

"I didn't know I had to go until I wanted to, Limber Joe," was the curt reply.

The guide seemed to realize that he had spoken roughly, so said in a different tone:

"Weil, young pard, it hain't good fer one o' your years to lose sleep."

"I had a bad dream that scared me."

"I guess I eat too much."

Charlie agreed with him mentally, though he said nothing, but soon had his bed ready and at last remarked:

"Well, as I'm getting awful sleepy I guess I'll turn in, as the sailors say."

Limber Joe made no reply and Charlie soon settled himself among his blankets but with his eyes turned toward the guide.

The blaze flickered down to a steady glow, and the guide sat near the fire smoking.

At last he called:

"Young pard?"

No response came.

"I say, little pard, I'm a-goin' ter scout around a leetle bit afore I lays down, as Injuns might be about."

But the boy seemed to have dropped to sleep in spite of himself, for he made no response to the words of the guide.

At last Limber Joe arose and quietly glided away from the camp.

Getting out of the arc of the firelight he halted and looked back.

The boy still lay perfectly quiet, and the guide once more moved on.

He went along the way they had come to the trail they had been following.

There he halted at the spot where he had left the stick with the piece of paper caught in it.

The stick was gone.

"Barney has been here, and I guess is campin' within bearin'."

"I'll just give him a call."

Instantly the shrill, plaintive notes of a screech owl were heard, the man imitating the night-bird well.

After a short wait the call was answered from down in the valley, and not far away.

The guide responded after awhile and then remained silent.

It was not long before a man was seen coming toward him.

"Barney!"

"Yes, Pard Joe."

"I'm here."

"So am I."

"Yas."

"And the boy?"

"Is asleep in the camp."

"Is it far from here?"

"Not a quarter of a mile."

"Waal, what's up?"

"To carry out our little game."

"I s'pose we has ter."

"Yer don't mean ter wilt now ther game are bagged?"

"No."

They were silent for some moments and then the man called Barney asked:

"Is yer sart'in he has got so much dust with him?"

"Waal, I seen him buy ther horse, and he hed a big roll o' money with him."

"About how much?"

"I c'u'dn't tell, but it were considerable."

"Then he has ther horse, his outfit, weapons and altogether it won't be no small haul."

"No, but he's a boy."

"What does it matter?"

"I hates ter git away with a boy."

"Bah! a life's a life."

"No it hain't."

"What does yer mean?"

"I mean jist this, that a life hain't all ther same, fer I tuck a woman's life on'st, and I'll never disremember it as long as I lives."

"It were awful, and I sees her now o' nights, a-hauntin' me in my sleep."

"Men I has killed and a number of them; but that one woman haunts me more than enough, I kin tell you."

"Waal, ef yer don't want ther job jist say so, pard."

"I wants ther money, and I believes we is ter go shares?"

"Yes, you do ther work and we goes shares."

"Then we lights out fer Texas."

"Yas, fer folks is beginnin' ter think we isn't all right."

"Waal, I has ther Injun arrows, ter make believe Injuns did it, and we'll scalp him too."

"You will?"

"Waal, yas, and we kin pack our traps on his horse and lighten ther weight ours is ter carry, so we kin git along pretty lively."

"I guesses we can, and we'll have ter, fer ef anybody as knows ther boy started arter his uncle, and they overtakes ther train and he hain't put in an appearance, then ther will be music of a kind I doesn't like ter hear singed."

"That's so."

"Cap'n Emmett hain't no man ter injure an' hev him fergit it, and ef he suspicous that ther has been foul play with ther boy, ther Vigilantes will take up ther trail sart'in, so we doesn't want ter spend time foolin' arter we has done ther deed."

"That's so, and we'll lose no time now, so come on."

The two men who had so coolly plotted the murder of a boy, for what money and property he had, then walked off toward the camp.

The fire was burning up again, and the light revealed the form of the boy just as Limber Joe had last seen him.

"Knife him, Barney, for yer don't want ter do no shootin' here," said Limber Joe in a hoarse whisper.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KNIFE-THRUST.

THE situation of Charlie Emmet was a pitiable one.

He was but thirteen years of age, and feeling that he had been wronged at home and school, by punishment he had not deserved, he had run away.

He had not been cast down when he found his uncle gone from St. Louis, to such an extent as to cause him to turn back, but with pluck and perseverance he had pushed on in the face of all obstacles.

That a man whom he had hired at a good price to guide him on after the train of his uncle could be so base as to betray him, he could hardly believe.

But, fortunately for the boy, his uncle had told him much of life in the wild West, its dangers, and the treachery of the Indians and many of the whites one met there.

He had said that there were cut-throats on the border who would kill a woman for ten dollars, and thus, by these stories of wild life, Charlie had come to understand that he was in danger

when he saw that Limber Joe had a pard following him.

Alone, a boy, and plotted against, he felt his position keenly.

At first he was almost crushed under the thought of his danger, and he was half impelled to await the chance to mount his horse and slip away, going back to Omaha and reporting what his guide had done.

But then he could only tell that he had seen him leave slips of paper as a guide to one who was following, and which might really mean no great harm to him after all.

"No. I'll not get scared and back down at my first danger."

"If I do I'll never make a scout, and that's what I want to be."

"I'll stay and risk it, and maybe if I am only a boy I can hold my own if it comes to trouble."

It was with this decision that he set to work to make his bed of blankets and dare out the situation.

Limber Joe, when he went to meet his pard, Barney, was gone about an hour.

Had Charlie overheard all that was said between them he would indeed have had cause for alarm.

Back to the camp came the two men, and as Barney drew his knife and felt the point with his finger he said in a whisper:

"Let us understand it all through, Joe."

"Waal?"

"We devides ther money equal?"

"Yas."

"And takes the traps in common?"

"Jist so."

"And ther horse?"

"I wants him."

"So does I, and as I does ther red work I've got ter have him."

"Say we sells him and devides."

"No, I wants ther horse."

"So be it, pard, we hain't goin' ter quarrel on that."

"And you shoots ther Injun arrers inter him and scalps him?"

"Why don't you do it?"

"'Cause I do ther knifing."

"Waal, scalp him too and shoot ther arrers inter him and I'll say nothin' more about ther horse and give yer his rifle as well."

"Seems to me, Pard Joe, ye'r awful coward-like about killin' ther boy, or even shootin' arrers arter he is dead, inter him, and scalpin' him."

"Waal, I don't care ter do it, and you said you would, so if yer back down, say so, and I'll go my way with ther kid."

"No. I does ther work: but maybe it would be best ter shoot him."

"I doesn't wish no firin' done."

"With arrers?"

"No, fer ef yer didn't kill him, and he are covered up with blankets, then we'd hev ter fight, fer ther boy is grit clean through, and he's a dead shot, too, as I has seen comin' along."

"He'd fight us both, and maybe one o' us would git hurted."

"Knife him, Barney."

"Jist as you says, pard."

The two men now moved nearer to the sleeping boy.

Limber Joe went to the fire and sat down, with his back toward the victim, while Barney crept around toward him.

Seen by the firelight Barney looked just the man to do the cruel work he was intending.

He was short and stout, but of a powerful build, and he wore top-boots into which his pants were stuck, a blue woolen shirt and a slouch hat that was pulled down hard over his cruel, evil face.

He had his belt on, and his revolvers on his hips, while his long, ugly-looking knife was in his hand.

The sleeve of his shirt he rolled up, as though to do the red work the better, and he crept along with the noiseless movement of a panther.

Having made up his mind to do the deed he nerved himself to it without a tremor.

There was no shrinking now, no hesitation.

He would strike the blow, and only one should be needed.

Nearer and nearer he crept to the sleeping boy.

There lay the slender form enveloped in his blankets, and he had turned over, for his face was no longer toward the firelight.

Following what he had heard his uncle say, he had placed his hat over his head, as bordermen do when sleeping.

Nearer and nearer crept the assassin, and with-

out the slightest sound, for even his breathing was suppressed.

At last he reached the edge of the blankets and halted.

He selected the spot where he would strike, just over the heart, for the boy lay upon his right side.

He glanced quickly toward the firelight, and as he did so saw Limber Joe turn his head in an impatient way, as though at the delay.

Then he raised his hand and brought the knife down with telling force until it sunk to the hilt in the blankets.

CHAPTER VII.

NERVE.

THE sharp blade of his bowie-knife had not more than cut the outer blankets, before Barney realized that it was not meeting with the resistance of a human form as he expected it would.

He knew at once that there was no boy beneath those blankets, and he started to spring to his feet with the words upon his lips:

"Pard, we has been fooled!"

"Look out fer that kid!"

But just as the words were uttered, there came a flash back in the pine thicket and Barney fell backward and writhed in agony, while he clutched at his revolver.

Limber Joe had heard the words and he was upon his feet in an instant.

He drew his revolver, and just then came the shot which knocked his partner in crime over.

Instantly Limber Joe ran for cover, and as he did so he heard the shrilly uttered command of young Charlie:

"Stop, Limber Joe, or I'll shoot you!"

But, Joe, at heart a coward, and with his pard killed, bounded all the faster to hunt cover, where he felt that he would be on more than equal terms with the boy.

But Charlie seemed to have this same idea, for he again called out:

"Stop, I say!"

But Joe did not stop, and so a flash came and a bullet sped by his head.

As he did not fall Charlie fired again, and then a third time, just as Limber Joe was within a few feet of the timber.

The third shot sent him sprawling upon the ground, and rolling over he reached the shelter of the trees, though he was wounded without any doubt.

"Now let that cussed boy show himself, and I'll nail him."

"He's put a bullet through my leg, and Barney's dead, so I've got ter kill ther kid myself."

"I'd a' kilt Barney anyhow ter git the whole outfit, so that's all right, ef I kin only git a chance ter cover ther boy."

So mused the man and he felt safe in his place of shelter.

His rifle he had not tarried for, so he had only his revolvers; but he felt these were enough if he could catch sight of the boy, and the horses were near him, so they could not be reached by Charlie without coming within range.

"It's a nasty wound, he has give me, though ther bone hain't broke."

"Ter bullet went through my thigh, and I thought I war kilt."

"Maybe I kin fool ther kid."

"I'll try it."

So saying he called out:

"I say, Charlie, did they hurt you?"

No answer came and he said again:

"Leetle pard, they got inter camp afore I seen 'em, and I was wounded as I run to cover; but I hopes you hain't hurted."

Still no response.

"Pard Charlie, why doesn't yer answer me, for we must git tergether and light out o' this, for thar is enemies around and no mistake."

Still no answer came from the boy in the pine thicket, and Limber Joe began to grow very uneasy.

The fire brightened up again suddenly, and the blaze revealed the whole camp and its surroundings distinctly.

"Consarn ther kid, what are he up ter?"

"Maybe Barney did kill him arter all; but then ef so who fired them four shots?"

"No, he are a peert kid and is a-lyin' low."

"I doesn't mind, fer when it comes ter a tenderfoot boy a-foolin' Limber Joe in trickery, it can't be did."

"I'll jist keep under cover and watch things: but I must tie this etarnal wound up fu'st, fer it are a-bleedin' pretty peert."

He was engaged in the work of binding up his wound, with strips cut from his shirt, when right behind him came the boy's shrill voice:

"Now I've got you, Limber Joe!"

"Oh Lordy! beat and by a tenderfoot kid," groaned Joe.

He had laid his revolver down, his hands were busy tying up his wound, and there not six feet behind him and leaning around from behind a large tree, was runaway Charlie.

He had his rifle to his shoulder and it covered the guide.

Then, too, the boy was in the shadow while Joe was in the full light.

"How in thunder did yer git thar?" growled the guide.

"I crept around here to head you off. I'm only a tenderfoot kid, Joe, but I've got you dead sure if you don't mind."

"What does yer want?"

"Take your other revolver from your belt and toss it several feet from you."

"I won't."

"Then I'll shoot you and shoot to kill."

"Hold on!"

"Well?"

"Thar goes ther wepon."

"Good! Now lie flat down upon your back."

"What fer?"

"Do as I say, because I'm in no humor to be fooled with."

"What's ther matter with you anyhow?"

"Nothing is the matter with me; but your pard is dead up yonder and you seem to be wounded."

"If you don't mind me I'll shoot you sure."

"What shall I do?" roared the man.

"Lie down flat on your back!"

"I'm down."

Charlie then advanced, still covering the man with his rifle, and said:

"Now unbuckle your belt."

It was done.

"Now turn over on your face."

This was done also.

"Put your hands behind your back."

After some growling Limber Joe obeyed, and with a piece of twine he had taken from his pocket, the boy securely bound the man's hands, paying no attention whatever to his assertions that the string was cutting to the bone.

"Now you are my prisoner, Limber Joe; but I'll tie you with a lariat, for I don't wish to hurt you, though you did intend to kill me."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE RIFLE'S MUZZLE.

THE situation shows that Charlie was by no means caught napping.

He had kept his word to himself, not to go to sleep, and had as soon as he saw Limber Joe go away from the camp, hastily arranged his plans.

His blankets were arranged to look as though he was under them, and his hat was placed over the spot where his head would have been.

Then he took his rifle and got back in the pines to a position which would command the camp.

He waited patiently, and was soon brought to a realization of his desperate danger by seeing the two men approach.

All that they did came under his eye, and he was quickly assured of the fact that he was to be killed and robbed.

He made no movement, however, and did not lose his nerve, for he took in the chances for and against him with wonderful coolness.

The sneaking form of Barney he scanned closely, and said to himself:

"I don't wish to kill a man, but if he uses that knife on what he thinks is me, I'll pull trigger, and that don't end it, for Limber Joe means to kill me."

At last Barney dealt his blow, and Charlie was as good as his word.

His nerve did not fail him, but he felt a sinking sensation at the heart, when he felt that his bullet was to go tearing its way into a human form.

That he would shoot true he was certain, for Charlie had proven himself a dead shot on many an occasion when a turkey or a fine steer was the prize to be contended for at a barbecue, such as are still held in the Southern States.

Often had Charlie's powers served the family with food, and now he was not going to fail when his life depended upon his aim.

Perhaps it was seeing Barney fall that shook him up a little, but he missed his aim in firing two shots at the flying Limber Joe, though that villain felt that they came dangerously near him.

Realizing that if Limber Joe reached the timber, he would hold every advantage over him, a boy and a stranger to the country, Charlie took good aim and fired the third shot.

The bullet cut through the fleshy part of the

thigh, and the shock knocked him over, as has been seen.

Then Charlie showed strategy, for he began to flank his foe, and with the camp-fire as a guide, he made his way around into the timber, and came up in the rear of the man who had proven so treacherous to him.

Having captured him, he made him go to the camp and there his new lariat was brought into use.

Limber Joe tried to teach him how to tie him, but Charlie felt that he knew best how it should be done, and the man was bound most securely with the lariat, the twine being cut as it was really cutting into his flesh as the guide said.

Then Charlie told him to sit down by a tree, and he made him fast to this.

"Give me what yer finds walu'ble on my pard, and I'll send it to his dear mother," said Limber Joe, his sordid nature showing itself even under the circumstances of his being a prisoner.

"Do you mean for me to search him?"

"Yas, of course."

"Well, I don't like to, but I will, and what he has I will turn over to my uncle for him to do as he deems best with it."

"Yer uncle?"

"Yes."

"Is yer goin' on ter him?"

"I am."

"How will yer find ther way?"

"You will guide me."

"I'll guide yer arter ther train ef yer leave me go when we gits in sight of it."

"No."

"Then I'm durned ef I do."

"All right, I'll take you back to Omaha, for I can find the way, and tell the people how you treated me."

This startled the guide greatly.

He well knew he would be hanged without mercy if the boy did this.

He would be wise to go on to the train, going slowly, and endeavoring to make his escape in some way before he reached Captain Emmett and his men, for they would string him up too, after hearing the boy's story.

It was safe to follow the trail, and trust to luck to get away.

So he said:

"Well, leetle pard, I'll guide yer on arter ther train."

"Yes, I had decided that you should, or I would take you back to Omaha."

"Now I suppose I must bury this man."

"Let me loose and I'll help you, for it's hard work diggin' a grave."

"Oh, I can dig it without your help," and Charlie approached the body with an awed manner.

The man lay as he had died, all in a heap from writhing in the agonies of death.

Charlie's hands were not very firm as he searched him for what he had about him, and found a knife, pipe some tobacco, his belt of arms, and some thirty dollars in money.

He put all in a bundle and tied it to his saddle-bags. Then he found a spot where he could bury him, and throwing more wood on the fire he set to work.

It was a dismal task for Charlie to be burying the man he had killed by the light of the campfire, and his prisoner watched him the while with admiration of the boy's wonderful pluck.

But, the task was at last finished, and, tired out, Charlie lay down for a few hours' sleep: but at dawn he awoke and said to his prisoner:

"Now, Limber Joe, you are to be my guide, and if I catch you betraying me again, look out!"

CHAPTER IX.

PLEADING IN VAIN.

LIMBER JOE had not said a word about the horse of his comrade in crime, Barney.

He had it in his mind to make his escape in some tricky way by noon at furthest.

If he could not get away with his horse, then he would have the animal of Barney's to fall back upon.

His pard's camp, as has been seen, was beyond the main trail, and hidden away down in a valley.

Of course, Barney had staked his horse out, and there he would remain until he, Limber Joe, returned for him.

So he kept silent about him.

But Charlie was as keen as a razor.

He had seen the man the evening before on horseback and he knew that his horse must be where he had waited for Limber Joe to join him.

He broke camp, saddled the horses and then

aided Limber Joe to mount, when he set to work and bound him so that he could not slip out of his saddle, greatly to the rage of the man.

Then he took the end of the lariat rope and put it about his own saddle-bone.

"Now, Limber Joe, where is your pard's horse?"

"He come on foot."

"He did not."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think, I know."

"How does yer?"

"Well, when you got half drunk on that medicine last night, and went to sleep after supper, I went on a scout, and I saw your pard, and I read the note you left for him."

"I have the note here, for I took it from his body."

"Now where is his horse?"

"I don't know."

"You do, for you left camp when you thought I was asleep, to meet him."

"I didn't go to his camp."

"Well, I can find it."

"You hain't no trailer."

"I've learned from your trailing enough to track him to his camp, and I'll do it!"

"It hain't your horse, boy."

"I'll take him ali the same."

"He's got pards here, so yer better stay away."

"I'm talkin' fer yer own good now."

"I know that he was alone," was Charlie's answer, and he rode on toward the spot where the stick with the paper in it had been left in the trail for Barney.

He reached the spot and eyed the ground closely.

He saw the tracks of Barney's horse turning off the trail and so followed them.

"Yer is goin' wrong, boy."

But Charlie made no reply and only smiled.

He followed the trail to the camp of Barney and there found the horse, who neighed with delight at his coming.

The animal was a good one, and there was Barney's outfit just as had left it.

Charlie gathered up the traps, strapped them on the horse, and then returned to the main trail.

He did not ask Limber Joe a word about following it, but turned quietly into it himself.

"Yer is goin' wrong, pard."

"If I am, you were wrong yesterday, for here are the wagon-tracks, the smaller ambulance wheels, and the hoof-prints of the horses that the traders rode," said Charlie.

So on he went, following the trail readily, and only going slow when the nature of the ground left no tracks.

"I say, pard," began the man, who was now becoming alarmed at seeing that the boy was able to take care of himself.

"Well?"

"I think we kin come ter terms."

"How so?"

"Waal, now, yer don't understand me."

"Yes I do."

"Yer thinks I went back on yer?"

"I know it."

"Now, I wants ter tell yer that it was Barney did it."

"Look here, Limber Joe, I was no more asleep than you were, and I saw all."

"You meant to kill me, take my horse and traps, and that would have ended it."

"Now I am going to push on after the train, and I'll tell my uncle all, and what he says I'll agree to."

"Does yer know what he'll say?"

"No."

"I'll tell yer."

"Well?"

"He'll just say string me up."

"I guess not so bad as that."

"Yer don't know 'em, for out here there hain't no justice, and I'll be roped, sart'in."

"Well, you would have deserved it if you had killed me."

"But I didn't do it, an' so I begs yer ter let me off."

"No."

"Yer kin say as how Barney attacked us and yer kilt him; but yer don't want ter hev my life on yer hands."

"No, I do not."

"Then jist let me go, and thar hain't nothin' I won't do fer yer."

"I'll give yer Barney's horse and outfit, and I'll pray fer yer."

"Then you'll see me hanged up."

"I think not."

"Thar hain't no jails out here, so they can't put a man in prison, and they jist ropes him, and I knows Cap'n Emmett, and up I goes."

"Well, it was your own fault, and I cannot help it."

"I shall take you on after the train, for if I set you free I know you, knowing the country as you do, would head me off and kill me."

"No, I won't trust you, so, Limber Joe, you need not beg any more, for I mean what I say, and you can't argue me into letting you go," and Charlie's face showed that he meant all that he said.

CHAPTER X.

PLAYING 'POSSUM.

THE traitor guide felt that argument was indeed useless, where the boy was concerned, and so he remained silent.

But his brain was busy, plotting some way that he could escape from his young captor.

The trail was well marked, and being only several days old, was easily followed.

Limber Joe calculated that at the rate the train traveled, it was then some forty to fifty miles ahead; but at the pace which Charlie set to follow it, he would overtake it by the noon camp the following day.

So he regarded his chances of escape as depending upon the noon camp that day, and the night halt.

His wound was very sore, though Charlie had dressed it for him in the morning, using a couple of his own handkerchiefs as bandages.

He had remembered how at home arnica had been used for cuts and bruises, and so he had bought a bottle of it in St. Louis, with some adhesive plaster and other things to carry along.

The truth was, Charlie was expecting hard knocks, and his ingenious mind prepared for all emergencies.

So he had dressed the wound quite skillfully, and said he would do the same at noon, and when they halted for the night.

The nature of the country, bordering the Missouri River as they were, for the trail ran not many miles from it, was wild and rugged.

Charlie felt his full responsibility, and he knew that if Limber Joe could turn from the right trail he would do so.

Other trails branched off here and there, but the boy had learned the tracks of the wagons and the ambulance too well to be fooled.

He had Barney's horse tied to the horn of his saddle on one side, and Limber Joe's on the other, with length of lariat enough to drop into single file when the nature of the trail demanded it.

He pressed on as rapidly as he thought the horses would stand it, for he knew they would have a chance to go slow after overtaking the train.

Limber Joe having failed in his argument for freedom, began to "talk Injun."

That is, he kept telling the boy that they were liable to run upon a band of red-skins at any moment.

He pointed out fresh signs on the trail and said that Indians were certainly following the train.

"I'll tell yer, pard, that if we strikes Injuns, it are yer duty as a Sunday-school scholar ter set me free, fer I doesn't wish ter be kilt and scalped with my hands and feet tied up."

"Yer see if we sees Injuns, and ther chances be we'll jump 'em any minute, yer must let me go free for then comes in my work o' savin' us both."

"How?"

"Waal, ef we has ter fight, two is better than one, and if we has ter run fer it, I know ther country and 1 kin circle round and reach ther train by headin' it off, while you'll git lost ef yer leaves ther trail fer a leetle bit of a minute."

"Does yer tackle my argument, leetle pard?"

"I do, and I guess you are right."

"Now yer is talkin' big sense."

"But if we have to run for it, you can act as guide just as well tied as if you were loose, and it's my intention to run, for I don't know how to fight Indians, and our horses are all good ones."

"We'll run, and you do the guiding."

"How kin I, ef I'm tied," savagely asked the prisoner.

"You'll have to, for you are not blindfolded and can see."

"I can't ride feet tied as I am."

"Well, if they gain on us I'll just leave you behind and take my chances alone."

"Oh Lordy!" groaned the man at this threat of the boy.

It was very evident to Limber Joe that he had "caught a Tartar," to in the end be caught by one.

He had plotted for a little gain, what money, traps and the horse that Charlie had, and Barney doing the killing he would suffer no compunctions of conscience.

But that he and Barney would find a snag in the way, in the shape of Charlie's pluck had not entered his mind.

That a boy just in his teens could outwit and defeat two men he would never have believed.

But here he was in the power of the boy, and in a fair way to end his life at the noose end of a lariat, when the fur-traders got hold of him.

The halt was made at noon, and after he had cooked dinner Charlie fed his man first, then ate his own meal.

Limber Joe growled, and swore, but it did no good, and Charlie serenely went on with his way of doing matters.

He had already learned how to find the best places to stake out a horse, and he rested them by taking off saddles and bridles, not minding the trouble.

He camped early, so as to get all arranged before dark, and found a good camping-place.

He had prepared supper, and Limber Joe began to beg to have one arm free to eat with.

Charlie examined the lariat, found it was not too tight, and said:

"No, I'll feed you, Limber Joe, for you are planning some deviltry I can see."

"No, pard, I'm not feeling well, I am so dizzy, and I have a pain in my heart—I—" and Limber Joe fell over in a heap, struggled a while and then lay quiet.

"Lor', he's got a fit, I fear."

"I believe he is going to die, and what will I do—Limber Joe! Joe! speak to me!"

But Limber Joe lay like a dead man.

He did not seem even to breathe, and when Charlie shook him he appeared to really be dead.

"I suppose I ought to unbind his arms and feet, for maybe it would bring him to," muttered the boy, and he looked the man straight in the face as he uttered the words.

Then he threw a tin cup of water in his face, but Limber Joe did not flinch; he seemed beyond water reviving him.

Then Charlie ran to his saddle-bags and returned with a small bottle labeled "Hartshorn."

This he jammed quickly under the man's nose and Limber Joe uttered a war-whoop and rolled over as though in convulsions, sneezing and snorting terribly for awhile and then lying quiet again like a dead man.

"Well, he's not dead, that's certain," said Charlie, and he arose and looked about him to suddenly cry out:

"Oh, Lordy! there comes a band of Indians!"

In an instant Limber Joe was aroused, and white as death called out:

"Injins! For God's sake, boy, let me free!"

CHAPTER XI.

"INJUNS."

THE sudden and alarming cry of Charlie Emmett, that there was a band of Indians in sight, aroused Limber Joe with a quickness that was ludicrous.

He had been given a surprise with the hartshorn, and yet though he had wiggled about like a dying snake and sneezed as though he had taken snuff he had kept from swearing, and held his eye closely shut the while.

But when Charlie tried another ruse, for before releasing him of his bonds, he was determined to be sure, he roused Limber Joe from his pretended comatose state.

With Indians coming, and he bound beyond all chance of escape, Limber Joe was so terrified that he turned white, and quickly revealed the truth that he was "playing 'possum."

So he sat up wild eyed and scared, and repeated:

"Injins! did yer say Injuns was comin'?"

"Yes, I said so, Limber Joe, but I didn't know you were so easily scared, and you a great scout and Indian-fighter, too," and Charlie lay back on the grass and fairly shouted with laughter.

"You is a durned fool, boy, and you thinks you is so smart," growled Limber Joe, though he was glad to know that the report was a false alarm.

"The hartshorn pretty nearly fetched you, Limber Joe, but you stood it well."

"My! how you did wiggle though, like a man I once saw in a circus."

"But the Indian alarm did scare you, didn't it?"

"Naw! I was only jokin' with yer ter scare you, makin' yer believe I were dead."

"Well, I didn't scare so bad, did I?"

"Well, I has heerd tell o' a bad boy on'st, I think it was read ter me out o' ther Bible when I was a good leetle kid, and this boy he ust ter cry wolf while he was 'tendin' sheep, just ter make people come to him so he could fool 'em."

"But one day he did see a Ingin—"

"An Indian in the Bible, Limber Joe?"

"I means a wolf—you knows what I means."

"Well, he saw a wolf?"

"Yas, and there was a whole pack of 'em, and they come and chawed ther boy all inter Christmas mlnce-meat, and so he got punished for his badness."

"Well, Limber Joe, I didn't wish to see you die and I had an idea that to call out Indians would raise you, and it did."

"But come, supper is ready."

"Hain't yer goin' ter let me rest my arms?"

"Yes, I'll give you a chance to rest them when we overtake the train, and as you must know the trail by night, if you wish to push on I am willing, and we will catch up before morning."

"No, I wants rest."

"Well, come, let me feed you," and Charlie fed his prisoner as patiently as though he had been a baby.

He did not doubt that the man was tired of being bound; but then he dared not set even one hand free, as he feared he would make some effort to escape that would force him to kill him.

He had intended freeing his hands when he fell back ill, for he did not, at first, believe he was shamming.

But when he spoke of so doing he caught the quick expression of deviltry that swept over the face of the prisoner, and that determined him upon using the hartshorn.

This proved to him that the man was "playing 'possum," and he sprung the Indian alarm upon him with the effect of giving him a very bad scare.

He spread his blankets for him, bound his feet and covered him up. Then he looked after his horses and went to bed himself.

He was awake with the break of day, built a fire and got breakfast.

His prisoner was morose and in an ugly humor.

But Charlie fed him his breakfast, and accordingly as the spirits of the prisoner went down, at the thought of reaching the train that day, his spirits arose.

He saddled up the horses, aided his prisoner to mount, and had just gotten into his saddle, when he saw a party of horsemen coming across the plains.

"Oh, Limber Joe! see there!"

"Injuns, sure as shootin'!"

"Quick, boy, undo my hands, for we is in trouble now, sartin," cried Limber Joe, eagerly, and in a voice that trembled.

"I won't set you free, and I guess we can run for it, Joe, for our horses are fresh," and Charlie led the way toward the trail.

"It's the smoke from the camp-fire that they saw, and we is done for," and Limber Joe looked back at the band of Indians.

Charlie was excited, he had to admit it; but he was no more so than was the great Indian-fighter, Limber Joe.

Except a few friendly Indians, the boy had never seen any before.

This was his first look at the red-skin in his wild state, and on the war-path.

"They is Sioux," said Limber Joe.

"Are they worse than other Indians, Joe?"

"They is terrors from 'Wayback."

"Where is that?"

"Anywhar and everywhar; but them Injuns is a-comin' ter kill."

"There are just twenty-seven of them," said Charlie as he finished counting them.

"Yes, and they is just that many more than I wishes ter see."

The Indians had been a long way off when discovered by Charlie Emmett, and when they saw that they had been seen they put their ponies to a run.

Charlie had urged the three horses into a rapid gallop, and had wisely made for the trail they had been following since leaving Omaha.

But the Indians gained, and Limber Joe said:

"Say, leetle pard, we has got ter do better than this."

"All right," and Charlie having struck the trail urged the horses into a run and they held their own.

But the red-skins came swiftly on, and at last as they reached a stream, with high banks upon the other side, Limber Joe said:

"Say, pard, we'd better halt over yonder and give ther critters a blow, while we kin check up ther Injuns with a few shots—then git again."

"All right."

"Jist cut this lariat then; it's fight now, or git scalped."

"I'll do the fighting, Limber Joe," was the cool reply of the boy as they rode into the stream.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD.

IT so chanced that the crossing of the stream was the very place to make a stand.

The bank on the other shore was high, heavily timbered and sloped back toward a plain.

The approach upon the sides from which they came was a plane without a break in it.

The spot chosen for the ford was where a ravine on the other shore became a torrent in a heavy rain and washed out into the stream a shoal two-thirds of the way across.

On each side of this there was deep water, and to reach it a horse had to go up to his neck.

Having crossed, the guide told Charlie to halt the horses back over the slope, out of range of Indian arrows, and to creep with him up to the ridge and then they could use their rifles.

The red-skins were fully half a mile away, and when they approached the ford a hot fire would check them, for it would be supposed that the two horsemen belonged to the train, and were going to overtake it, so would not halt to fight.

"But do they know of the train?" asked Charlie.

"You bet they does, for they reads signs, and they is followin' it ter see what they kin git out o' it."

"Well, if you wish to go up the bank with me, all right; but I won't free your arms, and as we may have to run for it, you might not be able to get back and mount again."

"That's so; but yer'll need my help afore yer is done with them Injuns."

"All right, when I need it, I'll get it, and as you are as scared as I am, all I should do to help us out you'll tell me."

"Waal, ef I saves yer I expects ter hev you save me."

"All you do to save me will be to help yourself; but here we are now."

"Yas, so go up the hill and lie low."

"When ther reds reach ther ford, take good aim and let 'em have it."

"I will."

"Pick out ther chief."

"How will I know him?"

"He'll hev a war bonnet o' feathers on his head, and a-hangin' down his back."

"I'll look out for him."

"Now give me your rein and I'll watch the horses."

Charlie was about to do this, when a sudden suspicion flashed upon him.

"I guess not, Limber Joe, for you might run off and leave me afoot."

"I'll tie my horse, and as yours and Barney's are fast to my saddle-horn I think they'll stay."

"Cuss you fer a fool, boy, yer is as suspicious as a snake."

"Yes, and I am suspicious of snakes, Limber Joe, and afraid of them, too, and it's just a snake you have shown yourself to be."

With this Charlie fastened his horse to a tree, but in such a way that he could hastily untie him.

As the two other horses were secured by lariats to his saddle-horn, he did not feel afraid of their getting loose, while Limber Joe was securely bound hands and feet.

Then the plucky boy, taking the repeating-rifle he had bought in St. Louis, ran up the hill to the bank.

He peered cautiously over and saw the red-skins coming on at a run, and not a hundred yards from the stream.

A bush concealed him, and getting his rifle ready, Charlie drew a long breath and sought to calm himself.

"I mustn't get scared," he said, to cheer himself.

"I can run for it, and we ought to get to the train in a few hours."

"Now to be a man," and with another long-drawn breath he became cool.

The distance he had to fire was nearly two hundred yards.

It was a plunging shot, too, for the bank was fully fifty feet higher where he was than the stream.

The red-skins plunged into the stream, the chief leading, and their horses drove their noses far down into the cool waters to drink, while the riders leaned over, and scooping up water in their hands, drank also.

This was Charlie's chance. He took deliberate aim at the one with the feather head-dress.

The conduct of the Indians showed that they had no thought that the two they pursued would halt at the ford for a shot when they had such a long lead.

Charlie Emmett pulled trigger, and with the crack of the rifle the chief threw up his arms and fell backward into the stream, the swift current bearing him away. Several of the other warriors wheeled to go back out of range, but some of the more plucky dashed on to cross under fire.

Charlie's repeating-rifle now began to show its value. The undaunted boy did not lose his nerve. His second shot killed a pony, and the animal plunged in his death-agony into deep water below the shoal.

The third shot wounded a warrior, and as a fourth and a fifth rattled out, though doing no damage, the reds who had ventured to cross under fire turned about and fled for a position beyond range.

Two more shots followed them as they went, and another warrior fell from his pony, making two on the death-list for Charlie Emmett's first battle with Indians!

The boy hastily took in the situation, while he saw the arrows coming in showers toward him, though falling short.

Limber Joe had told him that they could cross below, by swimming their horses, and not to remain too long at the ford, if he checked them.

So he decided not to wait any longer, for the horses had had a rest of ten minutes, a drink of water when crossing the stream, so would be fresh for another run of it.

But Charlie was deeply interested in watching the Indians.

He saw that some of them had ridden down the stream to try and drag their chief's body ashore.

The brave whose pony had plunged into deep water with him, had struck out to swim to the shore.

"I could kill him, but I won't," said Charlie to himself.

The body of the warrior he had shot, as he retreated, his comrades had seized and dragged back out of range, where the larger number of the band sat upon their ponies and were yelling in their rage in a manner that fairly horrified the young adventurer.

"I guess I'll go now," said Charlie, as the yells became more blood-curdling, and having reloaded his repeating rifle he ran down the hill to join Limber Joe.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLEVER ESCAPE.

LIMBER JOE in his way was a character.

He was a man constitutionally wicked, and yet so cowardly that he feared the twinges of conscience continually.

He would dare much, or rather risk life to gain his ends, and yet he was so afraid of death that he had the horrors when he thought of dying.

He loved no one but Limber Joe, and would have robbed the man who befriended him as quickly as he would his worst foe.

Yet he had gained a reputation for pluck, and was known as a dangerous and bad man.

Captured so cleverly by a mere boy, cheated, as he put it, out of his money, for he already considered what Charlie had as his own, as soon as he had decided to go as his guide, and letting Barney into the secret to do the killing, on half shares, he yet intended, when he shrunk from taking the boy's life, to put an end to the existence of his companion in guilt as soon as safe opportunity offered.

But Charlie Emmett had quickly ended the career of Barney, and he held Limber Joe a prisoner, in spite of the pursuit by red-skins.

Limber Joe was as cunning as a fox, and he did not give up hope of escape.

He saw Charlie disappear in the timber on his way up the hill to fire upon the Indians, and instantly it flashed through his mind to get away, if he did go bound.

If he could ride off, leaving Charlie behind, then the boy would be quickly killed by the red-

skins, and that would silence his tongue regarding himself.

He could start the horses at a run and they would surely bear him to some one of the settlements on the river above Omaha.

At least there was a chance in that, while with the boy coming on he would be hanged as surely as he was taken on to Captain Emmett's train.

Determined to make the effort at least to escape, he decided upon this way.

Charlie's horse was tied by a horsehair lariat to a tree, and his horse and Barney's were fast to the horn of the boy's saddle.

The horsehair lariat was around the neck of Charlie's horse, and leaning over Limber Joe got it in his teeth.

Now he was proud of his teeth, and they were milk-white, sound, and sharp as a squirrel's.

He began to cut the horsehair rope with his teeth, and in three minutes had gnawed it in two.

The rope dropped to the ground, the horse was free, and with him the other animals.

Just then came the first shot from Charlie's rifle, and the horses were startled, so needed but slight urging from the treacherous guide, and dashed away at a gallop.

They took the wagon-trail they had been following, and for awhile the man allowed them to follow it unchecked.

He only wished to get out of reach of Charlie's rifle, and out of his sight, too.

"Won't he be scared, yes and mad, when he sees I have skipped?"

"But they'll soon catch him and then it's all up with the boy."

So he said to himself, while the rattling of the shots caused him to add:

"That boy is game, and I'll bet some of his shots are telling on ther Injuns."

He had quickly disappeared down a valley, and though the shots had ceased he heard the wild yells of the Indians.

"My! but them red-skins is hot and no mistake."

"If they catches ther boy now they'll make short work of him, for they is mad as a nest o' catamounts r'iled up."

He was glad when he got out of hearing of the Indians' yells, and as the three horses were still sticking to the trail he sought to turn them from it, going toward the river.

But the instinct of the horses told them that they were on the right trail, and they clung to it.

In vain did Limber Joe coax and rave, trying to turn the horse he rode from the trail, for the animal clung to it persistently.

He leant far over in his saddle, trying in vain to turn the horses to the right, but it was of no use, for to the beaten track they stuck.

"My gracious! they'll take me to the train, sart'in and sure, and then a pretty lie I'll have ter tell."

"Waal, Cap'n Emmett don't know as how ther boy is a-comin', fer ther kid told me as much, so all I has ter do is ter say two o' my pards was with me and got kilt by ther Injuns."

"No, that won't do, fer they'll want ter know how it be that I is tied up!"

He was puzzled for a while but soon struck upon an idea.

"I has it!"

"I'll jist say my two pards managed ter free themselves, as we was a-ridin' along with ther Injuns, and, jist as they was a-goin' ter cut me loose, they was discovered and shot, and I set ther critters a-goin' and got away from ther guards as was watchin' us, and whom ther boys hed wounded, hevin' got hold o' the' weepings."

"Yes, they'll swallow down that tale, and I'll be set free, and feel so bad I'll hev ter return ter Omaha, and instead I'll light out for Texas."

"I'll hev two good horses ter sell, and ther traps o' Barney and ther boy, and I won't fare so bad arter all."

"So, yer darned critters, keep on to ther train ef yer likes, fer it am a very cold day in winter when Limber Joe gits left even whar ther chances are big ag'in' him."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FUR-TRADERS.

THE wagon train of fur-traders, of which Captain Emmett was the commander, was a well-equipped one, fitted out most thoroughly for its service.

There were ten wagons, large, strong and capable of standing the hardest usage.

The wagon bodies had been made water tight, and the canvas coverings would protect the freight from any weather.

The mules were large, powerful, handy animals, and who were trained to subsist as prairie horses did upon what they could pick up.

There was an ambulance, and in it were medical stores and a surgeon's case, for there was a surgeon along.

The springs of the ambulance were of the best, so that a sick or a wounded man could be carried easily along.

Two of the wagons carried tents and stores, and the party were certainly well provisioned.

The others were full of all goods the Indian heart craved, for the traders knew just what to catch the red-skins' fancy with, and were well aware that something costing half a dollar would secure in a trade twenty dollars' worth of pelts.

But then the traders took their lives in their hands in venturing into the wilds and derived a large profit for their temerity and hardships.

Each wagon had a driver who not only understood his business, but was an old frontiersman and could turn scot, guide or Indian fighter at a second's notice.

They were armed with the very best weapons, also, and were true as steel.

They received big pay and all expenses, and were teamsters, fighters, and men of all work.

There were ten of these drivers, with two extras; and a couple of negroes in the ambulance, who were the cooks.

Besides Captain Emmett and his two partners, were twenty men who were trappers, hunters and guards.

Three guides, and a couple of Pawnee Indian scouts completed the outfit, and made up the number of forty men all told, and two-score better men were never congregated together to go trading up into the Indian country.

If all went well, the Indians trading freely, and pelts were prime, after an absence of six months the train would return to Omaha and bring a profit to the partners upon their venture of fifteen to twenty thousand dollars over all expenses, a sum well worth risking dangers for.

But if furs were not at their best that year, if they lost a wagon-load or two in crossing a stream, or spoilt by the weather, and the Indians harassed them instead of trading, killing horses, or running them off, then the owners would lose money instead of making it.

Many a fur-trading expedition had thus gone out and never been heard of again.

But Captain Emmett had made several successful trips, and he was known as a man to whom the Indians were inclined to be friendly.

He was a liberal trader, and he was a perfect judge of pelts.

Then, too, his march and camp were conducted upon military principles.

Every man had to do his duty, and any one shirking duty, or neglecting it, and risking the safety of the command, was severely punished.

Captain Emmett had once rescued a train from direct danger, the men having mutinied, broken into the hospital liquors, and with the red-skins all about them.

But he had shot the two ringleaders, and turned a third over to the Indians, and such summary justice brought the balance to their senses and the train was saved, while Emmett was made captain, he being then simply a junior partner.

Since then he had had no difficulty in carrying out a train, and in the face of threatened Indian troubles he had gone out with the outfit which Charlie was on the trail of.

The first camp out the men understood that there was to be no nonsense, for an Indian and a white scout were ordered to go around the encampment three times each during the night, each man to awaken the other after his rounds, and there was a regular posting of sentinels besides, four men being put on guard and relieved at midnight.

The wagons were placed so as to form a corral into which the stock could be driven, if there was an alarm, and the main force were to sleep with arms ready.

No card-playing was allowed after nine o'clock, and all about the camp was under as thorough discipline as though it was a bivouac of soldiers.

The march the following day was conducted with a guide and an Indian scout ahead, a couple of flankers on either side, and a rear guard of a dozen men.

The wagons had crossed the stream without accident or damage to the freight, and the distance set down for a day's march was not enough to over-fatigue the teams.

There were signs of red skins discovered the second day out, so that the greatest care was necessary to guard against a surprise, or an am-

bush, and the men were constantly upon the alert.

The train had camped beyond the ford, where Charlie had halted for his fight, and pressing on had gone some twelve miles, when the rear guard gave the alarm.

Instantly Captain Emmett had ridden back to the rear, while the train was hurried on to a position where a stand could be made near grass and water.

As he reached the rear guard he saw coming along at a run three horses and one rider.

They were right on the trail of the train, and the rider was Limber Joe.

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER SUSPICION.

"It's Limber Joe!"

So cried one of the men of the train as the single rider of three horses came dashing along.

"Was his coming the cause of the alarm?" asked Captain Emmett, a man of fine appearance and with a fearless, resolute face.

He was dressed in a serviceable suit for rough work, had a rifle slung at his back and was splendidly mounted.

"Yes, captain, we heard the rapid hoof-falls, and knew not what was coming, so gave an alarm."

"That was right: but stop the fellow or he'll go through the train."

The horses were brought to a halt, and then it was seen that Limber Joe was securely bound.

"Ho, pard, you seem to be in trouble," said Captain Emmett, in a kindly way.

"I is for a fact, cap'n, for I is tied tighter than ther bark on a tree, and I has been wounded to boot, while my two pard's has had the' checks called in."

"I have seen you in Omaha."

"You are Limber Joe, I believe?"

"Yas, cap'n, what's left of me."

"When did you leave Omaha?"

"Day before yesterday, cap'n."

"Who with?"

"Barney and Jake Meyer."

"Where are they?"

"The Injuns jumped us and we got captured."

"See. I has this wound in my thigh: but we fit 'em off as well as we could, but at last got corralled and captured."

"I see, and then?"

"Waal, cap'n, we was tuk inter camp, and this mornin', just as we was mountin' ter ride, my two pard's, hevin' slipped ther bonds off the' hands, made a spring fer liberty."

"But they got it dead sure, afore we c'u'd git clear o' ther camp, thought I were able ter do better, and although ther red-skins kept a-comin' arter us, I held out and here I be."

"How many red-skins were there?"

"Some fifty, cap'n."

"And when were you wounded?"

"Night afore last, sir, when we were fired on."

"And the red-skins bound you this way?"

"Yas, Pard Cap'n."

"How long were you their prisoner?"

"We was captured yesterday, cap'n."

"See here, pard, you seem to tell a straight story, but the fact is I have heard that you were a very hard citizen, and your face don't belie the report."

"Now don't get r'iled, for I am answerable for my words, when you feel like taking them up."

"I doesn't see when a man comes to yer in ther fix I is, why yer should insult him," growled Limber Joe.

"It isn't an insult, if it is true, and I'll tell you just why I doubt you?"

"Why does yer?"

"Well, no Indian ever tied the knots upon your wrists and about your ankles."

"You see I noticed them, and it was the first thing made me doubt your story."

"I happened to be a sailor when I was a lad, and these knots were sailor knots, all of them, and they were well done."

"That hain't so, fer Injuns tied me up," said Limber Joe, though he began to look very uneasy, and the people of the train, which had halted for the noon camp, crowding around the man also thought there was considerable in the fact that the prisoner was bound with sailor knots.

"Then look here," continued Captain Emmett going rapidly over the horses and the outfit:

"Indians take their prisoners' weapons and all else they can lay hands upon, and here are your revolvers, rifle and knife tied to your saddle, and upon this horse is a bundle, and see, it has a belt of arms."

Going rapidly over the contents of the bundle Captain Emmett revealed the different things

which Barney had possessed and Charlie had so carefully tied up.

The men looked surprised, and the prisoner grew very pale.

Captain Emmett then said:

"See here, this horse has a fine outfit, saddlebags, blankets, a haversack of provisions, and—yes, as I live, a lot of boy's clothes."

"See here, pard, who were your companions?"

"They was pards o' mine."

"Waal, one was a young lad."

The captain ran hastily over the outfit of Charlie, and rolled up in one of the blankets he discovered a pair of revolvers and belt, which caused him to start.

It will be recalled that Charlie had purchased another pair of revolvers and a beautiful knife, when in St. Louis.

These he had intended for a present for his uncle; but he wore them on the trail, while his own, given him by Captain Emmett, he had wrapped up in his blankets.

Upon the revolvers given him by Captain Emmett was engraved his name, and as his eyes fell upon the weapons he uttered an exclamation that startled every one.

"Look here, man, these weapons I know well."

"See! they have my name upon them, and I gave them to Charlie Emmett, my nephew, away down in Shelbyville, Kentucky."

"You remember, Chalmers, he is the boy I told you I intended to bring back with me, only they wouldn't let him come."

"He's a plucky fellow, can shoot better than I can, ride any horse that goes on four legs, and I wanted to give him a chance out here. See! here is his little Bible, given him by his mother, and some trinkets I know well."

"Now, my man, I wish to know just what has happened to this boy, and if harm has come to him through you, then you made the saddest mistake of your life in coming to this train," and the face of Captain Emmett was now white with excitement, though outwardly he was calm.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRAITOR GUIDE'S STORY.

THERE were men in the train who had thought Captain Emmett rather severe upon Limber Joe at first.

He had come to the train helplessly bound, and had told his story, seemingly a straight one.

But the captain had untied his bonds and he knew that no Indian had tied the knots.

That was impossible, for it was no mistake his being tied with sailor knots.

Then he had known Limber Joe in Omaha as a worthless fellow.

A good guide, yes, but one who had been under suspicion of late of having led a train or two into trouble to gain his own ends.

So the captain had gone to work in his quiet, but searching way, and he had every suspicious thing about the man.

When he revealed his own revolvers that had been given to his Kentucky nephew, and then showed in the outfit of the boy, his Bible, some ambrotypes of some members of the family, one of the captain himself in border dress, there was no room for doubt but that Charlie had followed him, and when almost upon the train had come to grief.

The outfit of Barney revealed the money with the other traps, and the slips of paper which Charlie had found on the man when he searched him.

These were read aloud, and were all crudely written, and directions for Barney to follow, the last one being the paper the contents of which are known to the reader.

"Men," and as Captain Emmett faced the crowd, his face was very stern, his eyes burning:

"Men, this man has come into camp with a strange story."

"He said that two comrades and himself had been captured by red-skins, bound, and were to be carried off for torture to their village, when his pards, with smaller hands than himself, had slipped off their bonds and tried to escape, but were shot."

"He spoke of these two as men, not as a man and a boy."

"And how they, free, could not escape, while he, bound as he was, with three horses tied together, could do so, he did not explain."

"Now, away down in old Kentucky I have a nephew."

"He is a bright, gritty boy of about fourteen, I believe, whom I was anxious to have return with me."

"The family would not let him leave home,

and they either decided afterward to do so, after I left, or he has run away to join me.

"He was not turned back by not finding me in Louisville, St. Louis or Omaha, but has pushed on, just as he has the pluck to do, and this man can tell me why he has not reached camp.

"You see his traps here, and you see the outfit of another man, even to his money.

"These slips of paper tell that some one was being tracked, and I tell you that this man must talk and tell what he knows, for there has been foul play, I am assured."

The words of Captain Emmett went to every man squarely.

They all felt as he did, and all eyes turned upon Limber Joe.

He stood in their midst, white-faced and scared looking.

He was amazed at the manner in which Captain Emmett had read the truth of the situation.

It seemed that the evidence against him was conclusive.

But still he must stick to his assertions of innocence, tell the same story.

"Now, my man, what have you to say?" and Captain Emmett turned to the prisoner, for such Limber Joe really was now.

"What does yer want me ter say?"

"You know."

"I doesn't."

"Well, I'll question you."

"What fer?"

"To get at the truth."

"I has told yer."

"You have not."

"I has."

"Tell me your story again."

"What story?"

"Of how you happened to be on the trail."

"Waal, thar was a young man, yer might call him a boy, as wanted ter strike a trail ter see ther country, as he said."

"So he engaged me fer guide, and we started."

"Only you two?"

"No, Barney was along."

"Well?"

"He were my pard, and it were safer to have two of us, as the boy were a tenderfoot."

"Go on."

"We got along all right until we run inter a ambush."

"Indians?"

"Yas."

"Well?"

"We seen thar thar was a great many of 'em—"

"How many?"

"About fifty."

"And then?"

"So we didn't fight a leetle bit."

"But surrendered?"

"Yas."

"You, an old frontier guide, surrendering to Indians without a fight is good."

"Well, we did it."

"Go on."

"We was captured, and was tied to our horses, ther chief sayin' not ter touch our outfits but ter tie all together."

"The chief said this?"

"Yas."

"Who was he?"

"He were a white man."

"Ah! a renegade?"

"Of course, as he were with Indians."

"And then?"

"Ther chief tied us in our saddles, and our hands behind our backs, and we was left with two bucks to guard us."

"But my pards got their hands loose, slipped their revolvers tied to thier saddles, and opened on ther bucks, who fired back."

"My pards was kilt, I pushed the horses to a run, and as the bucks was kilt or wounded, I got away, and come on along your trail."

"That's thar true story, cap'n."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE BACK TRAIL.

EVERY one had listened most attentively to the story told by Limber Joe, and drawn out of him by Captain Emmett by the corkscrew process.

He had seemed to tell a straight story, the only difference being that he had at first spoken of Charlie Emmett as a man, not as a boy.

As he was, the captain said, about fourteen, this might be an oversight of the guide in referring to him.

That the chief of the Indians was a white man, a renegade, would account for the tying

of the sailor knots, and the prisoners being so bound, and left with two bucks as a guard, it seemed but natural that, when two of them got their arms loose, they had attempted to escape.

With two whites killed, and the two bucks wounded or slain, by the fire, the escape of Limber Joe looked very possible.

It was true that all wondered why the Indians had not taken the weapons, saddles and all else belonging to their prisoners, and so Captain Emmett asked:

"How was it that the Indians did not rob the three of you?"

"Well, ther chief wouldn't let 'em, and I suppose he wanted ter divide with himself."

"Yet where are the weapons of my nephew?"

"Didn't yer find 'em in ther blanket roll?"

"The boy is no fool to have his arms rolled up in his blankets, when on the trail."

"The weapons of Barney are here, and his other things, in this blanket, and yet you said that he and my nephew got hold of their arms and opened fire upon the two bucks."

"Well, they did."

"With what weapons?"

"The'r own, for they had others."

Captain Emmett shrugged his shoulders in an impressive way.

It was strange how quickly he could "corral" the prisoner by a few pointed questions, as one of the men said.

His partner, Doctor Dick Chalmers, who was surgeon of the train as well, and a splendid fellow who would fight his weight in wildcats, had at first felt that Captain Emmett was pushing the man too hard, for he seemed to "talk straight," as he whispered to the third of the partners, Dan Malone, a man who had been for years a fur-trader.

But now the former said in a whisper:

"Emmett will hang that fellow yet, Dan."

"Yes, he's got him corralled and it looks as though the pilgrim was lying by note," answered Dan Malone.

"Yes, he's playing a heel-and-toe quickstep with his tongue, though I didn't believe it at first."

"Nor I, Doc, though I do now."

"I only wish the boy is not dead."

"I fear he is."

"It looks that way."

"And Emmett loved him as though he was his own son."

"He did, indeed, and was always talking about the boy's nerve, and what a scout he would make."

"Poor fellow; I hope he will turn up."

"I pity Limber Joe when the captain knows the truth, for I am convinced now that the man talks crooked."

"Sure! but what is the captain going to do?"

"Listen."

Captain Emmett had been again looking over Charlie's outfit.

Now he said:

"I wish you to tell me, my man, how far back you left the Indians?"

"At the river ford."

"All of twenty miles?"

"Yas."

"And you came straight on our trail?"

"I did."

Then Captain Emmett was silent for a moment, but suddenly broke his reverie with:

"Doctor, I wish you would take command of the train, and remain in camp here, for I shall go on the back trail."

"I think you are right, captain, for you may make some discovery."

"Yes, so I feel, and I will leave this man here, a prisoner."

"I do not believe he can escape, but if he does so, I will make it a personal matter with the man who guards him."

"I'll see that he does not escape, captain."

"All right, Doc; but I feel the fellow is lying from A to Z, and I intend to find out, for I can read signs, and I'll go back a long way on the trail to read them."

"If I have wronged him, then I'll give him half my profits this trip, and they'll be big, I know."

"If I am right in saying foul play has been done against that boy, then Limber Joe hangs as sure as there is a rope in this outfit to hang him with."

"And he ought to do so."

"But, when do you start, captain?" asked Dan Malone.

"As soon as we have had dinner."

"Go well fixed, captain," said Doc Chalmers.

"Yes; I'll take Scout Girard and Pawnee Pete with me," was the answer, and Captain Emmett

referred to one of the white guides and Pawnee scouts.

"No, sir, you must take some of the men with you, for you do not know how many red-skins you may jump."

"Go ready to help the boy if he should be alive," said Doc Chalmers.

"I guess you are right, Doc."

"Of course he is, and you must take a dozen of the boys at least," Dan Malone urged.

"All right; that will make our strength fifteen, and we will have no reason to fear any half a hundred red-skins we may meet."

"Look after these traps, Doc, and the prisoner, and I'll come back when I know the truth."

And half an hour after, Captain Emmett, with fifteen followers, rode away upon the back trail.

CHAPTER XVIII.

READING SIGNS.

THE party of horsemen went off on the trail with Pawnee Pete the Indian scout and Girard the guide ahead.

Then followed Captain Emmett, and behind him came the dozen men from the train.

They were well mounted, their horses comparatively fresh, for the slow marching of the train had not distressed them, and each man was armed with a repeating-rifle, a new thing in those days, and of the Colt pattern, firing seven shots, and a pair of Colt's revolvers.

They went prepared for a campaign of several days if need be.

They had not gone very far before, upon ascending a rise, they beheld a party of horsemen coming along the trail they were taking the back track on.

"Indians," laconically said Girard, though they were a long way off.

"Sioux," said Pawnee Pete, recognizing at a glance the life-long and worst foes of his people.

"And about double our number," remarked Captain Emmett placidly, as he turned his glass upon them.

The Indians had sighted the whites about the moment they had been discovered, and they came to an immediate halt.

The whites had halted also, but after looking through his glass for a minute or more, Captain Emmett said quietly:

"Move on again, Girard."

The guide and the Indian scout at once obeyed, keeping some fifty feet ahead of the captain, while the men followed as far behind and on two by two.

The Sioux still remained stationary, but they could be seen to be excited and were gesticulating wildly among themselves.

The country was rolling, and the trail there led through a valley through which ran a stream, bordering its banks in its windings.

Back of the Indians there was a range of hills, with heavy timber and canyons so that they had a good place to retreat to.

The Indians remained still until they saw that their larger force did not awe their white foe, for Captain Emmett had ridden boldly by places where he could have halted for a fight where he would be sheltered.

As they were now within half a mile of the Indians the horsemen could see their exact force.

They counted twenty-four warriors, and two of these rode behind comrades, either being wounded, or having no horses.

They made a seemingly bold stand, deployed as though to fight, and then, seeing that the whites paid no attention to their maneuvers but rode quietly on, they grouped together once more and began to retreat.

The trainmen gave a yell at this, and the red-skins replied to it with cries of hatred and rage.

Captain Emmett had decided upon his course from the first.

Riding forward to where his red and white scouts were, he said:

"That is the whole of the party, for if there were more they would have sent a courier at once to order them up."

"Unless they intend to retreat and lead us into an ambush, cap'n," said the guide.

"They cannot do this in this country, Girard, for we could flank every dangerous position."

"That's so, sir."

"What do you think, Pawnee Pete?" and the captain turned to his Indian scout.

"All Sioux right there!"

"Small war-party," was the answer.

"Yes, that is just what they are, and it is the same band that fellow, Limber Joe, spoke of."

"He said about fifty, captain."
 "He saw double, Girard, in his fright."
 "You do not believe he was a prisoner to the Indians then, sir?"
 "No, I do not."
 "You believe he was playing some game?"
 "Yes, and got caught in it, so was bound, and made his escape."
 "You hope to find your nephew then?"
 "Yes, Girard, even if he is a captive of the Sioux."

"I wish to know just what has happened to him, and I will, before I leave this trail."

"Now let us quicken our pace, and see if we don't drive those red-skins into a run."

This was done, the horses being urged to a gallop, and the red-skins fell back rapidly.

They turned off of the trail too, and then Captain Emmett stopped and examined them again closely through his glass.

"They have no white prisoners with them, Girard, unless they painted and rigged them up, and as they did not expect to come upon us they could not have done this."

"I can see no prisoners there, but two of the braves appear to have been wounded and held on horseback by comrades mounted behind them."

"This means that they have been in a fight, captain."

"Yes, with some one."

"Will you follow them?"

"No, I stick to this trail now, back to where Limber Joe said he escaped, at the ford."

The red-skins seemed disappointed not to have the whites follow them off the trail, but continue straight on as they were going.

And when they had disappeared Captain Emmett pressed on more rapidly, and soon reached the ford, and at once sent his scouts into the timber to see if any foe was concealed there, while he searched the place for signs that would tell him much of what had occurred.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AMBUSH.

WHEN the party of white horsemen reached the place where the Sioux had turned off the trail, they halted and examined closely the tracks.

The Indians had disappeared, but as they went on once more the red-skins came into view and began to follow them.

"Chief," said Pawnee Pete.

"Yes, Pete."

"Some gone."

"How do you mean?"

"So many gone?" and Pawnee Pete held up his hand with fingers extended denoting five.

"Ah! you mean that five have left the band?"

The Pawnee nodded.

"Well, that means that they are up to some mischief."

"Can there be more of them after all, Girard, and they have sent after the other band?"

"They would not send five braves, captain."

"That's so."

"Well, we will push on to the ford, and once there we can tell if there was a fight, and just how big a lie Limber Joe invented."

"Captain."

"Yes, Girard."

"I don't believe that Limber Joe intended to come to our camp."

"Ah!"

"I notice that the three horses swerved from the trail quite often, but went back to it again, as though they knew where they were going, while he tried to turn them off."

"I noticed that their trail did swerve, Girard, and it is doubtless as you say."

"Now we will push on at a gallop, and see if these red fellows follow as rapidly."

"It may be a good thing for us, too, sir, as perhaps they picked their best mounted warriors, and those armed with guns, to get ahead at some point and ambush us where they could cut down our number and make their escape, we supposing it was a larger force."

"You are right, so we will push on at a run so that they cannot ambush us."

Away went the party then at a sweeping gallop, and the red-skins, still half a mile away, followed at the same speed, howling with triumph, as though they were driving their white foes.

Several miles were gone over at rapid speed, and then the range came in view that the river bordered, which the train had crossed the day before.

On they went, and dividing into a line, with the Indian and Girard ahead, they rode through the timber and up the slope.

They reached their camping-place of the night before, just off the trail.

But the tracks of Limber Joe's horses were not there.

These three animals had not left the main trail.

The men scattered to search the surroundings well, all but four, who remained on the trail at the edge of the timber to keep the Sioux in check with a belief that the entire force had halted there to go into camp.

Presently the Pawnee, who was off on the left, darted back as though fearful of being seen, and he motioned to Captain Emmett and the guide.

They at once rode toward him.

Then they peered through some bushes and saw five Indian warriors coming along the canyon, running back from the river, at a rapid gallop.

"Call half a dozen of the men, Girard," said the captain.

Then he turned his gaze upon the five braves again, and said:

"They are the five who left the band, Pete."

"Yes, five."

"They came on ahead to ambush us here."

"Yes."

"They are dismounting, I see."

"Yes, hide horses and go to bank up there."

"Wait for pale-face horses get into water, going over river and fire on back—kill heap, for have guns and bow and arrow."

"You have got their little game down fine, Pawnee; but here come the men and we can just wipe those five red-skins out."

"Yes, kill all."

"Yes, there must be not one escape, and you can have their scalps."

The Pawnee smiled, for the thought of his securing five Sioux scalps tickled him amazingly.

Girard now came up with half a dozen of the men and Captain Emmett said:

"Boys, the five Sioux who left their comrades came to ambush us here, when we rode into the river."

"We can turn the tables upon them, for they are leaving their horses and will climb to the wooded hill yonder, Pawnee says, and it commands the ford."

"Now they never expected us to leave the trail, and not expecting we would note their departure from the band and then ride so rapidly, the red devils think they have it all their own way and can take their own time."

"See, they have staked their ponies out in the canyon, and are coming."

"When shall we fire, captain?" asked one of the men.

"We will fire together, and when they get about half-way up the hill to that wooded point."

"You see there is a bare spot there."

"Yes, captain."

"When they cross that, I will give the word—say about when they are in the center of it."

"All right, sir."

"And, boys, take them in the order in which you stand, from right to left."

"There are five of them, and nine of us, so we should get the whole outfit."

"We are in easy range, and no man should miss," Girard, the guide, said.

"Now, men, take position, for they are within range now," the captain ordered, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XX.

A MYSTERIOUS SHOT.

THE four men left at the edge of the timber, by Captain Emmett, caused the following red-skins to believe that the whites had halted there to camp.

So they too halted, dismounting, though making no preparation to camp.

They knew that their five comrades must have gotten to their place of ambush, if they had ridden rapidly, even though the pace of the trainmen had been so greatly increased.

So they would wait to hear from them.

Of course, the white men did not intend to camp there for the night.

They had come back from the train because Limber Joe had reached them and given the alarm.

Perhaps they were going back to Omaha for aid, and perhaps to meet others coming to join them.

They did not know that Limber Joe was bound, and so they could not fully account for this coming back of the white horsemen.

When they moved on, then their five warriors would strike from ambush, dropping as many foes, and they could press on and aid in the killing.

So had the Sioux arranged it all.

The other men besides the four on guard at the edge of the timber, and those with Captain

Emmett, were still scattered through the woods, looking for signs of some kind.

They saw their comrades under their captain watching through a thicket, and knew that they had made some discovery.

Then they saw them preparing to fire, and awaited the result.

The horses of the party were meanwhile resting and cropping grass about in the timber, but hopped so they could not stray.

"See, men, they are taking it quietly," said the captain, and he pointed to the movements of the five red-skins.

"And those out on the prairie are as uneasy as a cat in a strange garret, I'll bet high on it, captain, for they don't know but by our halting here we may get onto their little ambush racket," remarked Girard the guide.

"Fine, kill all, miss not one."

"Fine scalp for Pawnee Pete," said that worthy, as the Sioux in the canyon came nearer.

They had now reached a point nearly opposite to the party in ambush.

From the position where they were the trainmen could see up the canyon for nearly half a mile, so the Indians had come into view as soon as they rounded a bend, and Pawnee Pete had quickly discovered them.

Now they were within easy range of the repeating-rifles, but instead of keeping on down the canyon, they branched off from the one at the ford, and through which the trail ran, the two coming together and forming a V in shape, the small end at the water's edge.

Instead of holding on toward the river, a hundred yards from where they were, one of the warriors pointed up the hill, and they at once began to ascend it.

"They know the place, and from that thicket up there could have emptied five of our saddles," whispered Girard.

"Yes, and gotten in another fire, as we would have been in the water, and close together," the captain whispered in return.

Up the hill, through the stunted growth growing on the canyon sides, they went, disappearing from sight.

"Ready, men, for they will soon reappear," said Captain Emmett.

Every man was ready, rifle in hand and cocked, and each one had already picked out his Indian for slaughter.

The bare space spoken of on the side of the hill, was some hundred feet square, and had been made by a landslide.

Up the center of this the Indians would have to go, and it was steep and slippery.

When they got to a point half way in the open space the captain was going to give the order to fire.

They were in Indian file, going close together, and the order in which they were moving the trainmen would select their men, five of them taking each a red-skin.

Then the other four of the party were to stand ready to drop any one that the first fire failed to bring down.

As the Indians would have all of fifty feet to run to cover, in going over that space, if not killed by the first fire, they would run a terrible gantlet and it would be a miracle if they all escaped death.

The men stood calm and determined, their rifles ready to level, their eyes watching for the appearance of the red-skins, and awaiting the command of their captain to fire.

Pawnee Pete had a smile of delightful anticipation upon his red face.

He was ready to make a bound, slide down into the canyon and scalp each Sioux warrior with dispatch and skill.

The first Indian soon emerged from the dense foliage into the open space.

Was it a foreboding of his fate that caused him to halt and glance about him?

Then a second appeared, a third, a fourth and the fifth and last.

Up over the open space they crept, and the order to fire was upon the lips almost of Captain Emmett, when suddenly from the hill-top above the Sioux burst forth a puff of smoke and a rifle-shot rung out sharply, while, with a death cry upon his lips the leading red-skin fell backward and rolled down the steep hill, a dead man.

But who had fired this mysterious shot?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SIOUX MISTAKE.

THERE was no mistaking the shot that rung out from the wooded point above, and which commanded the ford.

It came from the very spot where the five

Sioux had intended to go into ambush, only the shot was not fired down toward the river.

The first shot was fatal, there was no doubt of that.

The warrior had gone rolling down the hill into the thicket, and he had not fallen like one striving to save himself by tumbling into a place of shelter.

In spite of their nerve the trainmen, one and all, were taken aback.

Captain Emmett even forgot to order his men to fire.

As for the other four red-skins, they were simply bewildered, hardly realizing what had happened until a second shot rang out from the hill-top ambush.

The second warrior in line uttered a piercing yell, sprung six feet into the air, and went down the hill in somersets.

The other four decided to follow his example, as far as going down the hill was concerned, but as they started, a third shot came at the same instant that Captain Emmett called out:

"Fire!"

The rifles, nine of them, from the trainmen, flashed together, and followed the third shot from the hill-top ambush, and not a second behind it.

There was no doubt of the effectiveness of the fire, for the Sioux were knocked into a heap and rolled to the cover of the thicket.

At the same time, with the wild yell of the Pawnees, Pete went down the steep side into the canyon.

As he reached the bottom and started toward the other hill, where the Comanches lay, Pawnee Pete received a surprise that sent him flying to cover.

It was in the shape of a shot from the one whose fire had driven back the Sioux.

The bullet just clipped his shoulder, but it made him hunt cover with an alacrity that was ludicrous, and as he darted in behind a boulder he got a second shot, the leaden missile just missing his ear.

Pawnee Pete was amazed, and mad clean through; but he was in no humor to leave his hiding-place, even to secure the fine Sioux scalps.

He had seen too well the aim of that dead shot upon the hill-top.

Captain Emmett and the men had laughed at Pawnee Pete's sudden stoppage in scalp-hunting, but they had not time to investigate, as the warning cry of the four men on guard sent them flying to resist an attack.

The Sioux out on the open plain had heard the firing and set it down that their five comrades had ambushed the advance at least of the pale-faces.

The four guards in the timber they supposed had been left there as a blind to hold them in check for awhile.

So they decided that they would rush in upon those four visible foes, and kill them, even if they lost a warrior or two in doing so, and then crowd on after those who they believed were either huddled in the canyon, or had crossed the river under the fire of their red-skin comrades.

If they could thus catch them between two fires, with the loss of five at least that the ambush party had killed, and the four they meant to kill, they would make it a sad day for the balance when they took the trail.

So the Sioux argued, and mounting their horses they made a rush for the timber.

They spread into a long line as they came up, two ponies, which carried double, falling back in the rear.

The others, however, rushed on and charged the timber with wildest yells.

But right here the Sioux made a mistake.

Captain Emmett had wisely hopped his horses further up the shore, in a place that was protected.

So he called out to two of his men to rush to the horses, unhobble them and lead them down toward the edge of the timber to mount.

Then, with his other men, and those scattered about in the timber, they ran to take position to beat back the attack.

The dense undergrowth enabled them to form a line in the timber without being seen by the Sioux, and as they got into position Captain Emmett called out:

"Fall back, Dawson, you and your four men, and take trees in line with us!"

The four men obeyed, and the Sioux, believing them in flight, spurred on the faster, reached the first scattering trees, sending showers of arrows before them, and then realized their sad mistake when Captain Emmett's loud voice gave the command to fire, and twelve rifles cracked almost together.

CHAPTER XXII.

THEIR LAST WAR-TRAIL.

THE trainmen had picked their men.

They were not to be thrown into any excitement when fifteen of them had only twenty Indians to fight.

They saw the Sioux' mistake, and did not warn them of it.

They simply smiled and then pulled trigger at the word of command.

Almost like a platoon of soldiers firing, the rifles went off together.

The distance was some hundred and fifty yards and it was not to be expected that more than a third of the shots would do damage.

But more did, for four warriors dropped from their saddles, and three ponies went down with a crash, throwing their riders over their heads.

Then too it was evident that a shot or two had wounded a red-skin and a pony.

The surprise to the Sioux was appalling.

What was the firing over on the river, if these men were all here in the timber?

Who had their five comrades fired at from ambush?

There certainly must be other white foes to deal with.

With their ranks shattered by the loss of four warriors, three more dismounted and a couple wounded, they simply were terror-stricken and wheeled in flight.

But the wild yell of the fur-traders was heard, and there was mounting in hot haste and a charge of Captain Emmett and ten men.

He had ordered the others to remain in the timber.

Out they went like an avalanche of human and horseflesh, and down the slope at full speed, firing their rifles as they rode.

The Sioux had no cover near, and their ponies being worn by a long march, were not fresh as were the horses of the fur-traders, nor did they possess their speed either.

Rapidly the fur-traders overhauled them, and when their bullets began to patter into their midst, and a warrior or pony went down, then the Sioux huddled together and stood at bay.

Down upon them rushed the fur-traders.

They could have stood off at long range, with their rifles, and trying Indian tactics have circled around them, firing steadily, out of danger themselves, and thus have killed every one of them.

But the men of Captain Emmett's train were not made of that kind of stuff.

They would rush in and end it in a hand-to-hand fight, for the Sioux were now about equal in number, with perhaps the advantage of a brave or two more.

The Sioux stood bravely at bay.

Like the fatalists they are, when they had to face death they did not shirk from it.

They did cast longing glances over toward the hills, hoping for the coming of their five comrades.

But in vain they hoped.

Their arrows flew rapidly and surely at their foes.

A trainman fell forward upon his saddle, then dropped to the ground.

A second clutched at the air wildly, and went down in a heap on the ground.

A third was wounded, also a fourth.

Captain Emmett got an arrow in his shoulder, but tore it out with a smothered oath, and rode on at the head of his men.

Then a horse dropped with his rider, and another.

An arrow tore along the neck of Captain Emmett's horse, and the maddened animal uttered a snort of rage and pain and rushed on.

Another arrow stuck in the captain's thigh, but it too was jerked out impatiently and he rode on.

The fur-traders had slung their rifles at their backs now and were using their revolvers.

They had formed a circle about the red-skins and were closing in the fatal line rapidly.

A moment more and they were upon them, and the hand to hand fight was begun.

It was short, sharp and deadly.

The Sioux uttered their war-cries and their death-cries together, and fought with desperation.

The pale-faces had seen their comrades drop from their saddles, and they recalled the many fearful deeds done by their red foes.

They had much to avenge.

Hardly a man of them was there who was not wounded, and their horses were bleeding too.

When the wild struggle began, here and there a bowie-knife was used, and scalps were torn

from heads that a second before had throbbed with life.

A few more faint death-cries, and then wild, triumphant, savage yells, as the fur-traders burst forth with shouts over their victory, well and hardly earned.

Half a dozen Indian ponies survived the fight, and some of them had slight wounds.

They stood huddled together, trembling with fright, and were quickly seized by the victors.

And these victors?

They stood there panting, powder-begrimed and blood-stained, the fire of battle yet lingering in their eyes.

Two of their comrades were dead, a third dying, and all others had received slight wounds, their captain having been hit three times, and his horse also "plugged."

It was a sad scene, after this battle between red-skins and pale-faces, in which not one of the former lived to tell the story.

The Sioux band had been literally wiped out.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAWNEE PETE CORRALED.

A TERRIBLE scene it was, there in that open valley, where men had struggled without any barriers where they had fought for life or death.

There were witnesses of the fight, too.

These were Girard the guide and the men left with him back in the timber.

They had seen how deadly in earnest Captain Emmett was, and they shouted with admiration at his splendid courage and sweeping victory.

He had bade them remain there in the timber, and though tempted to disobey, they had obeyed.

They had longed to go out and aid their comrades.

But their comrades had shown that they needed no more men than those they had.

And away over in the canyon Pawnee Pete was watching for the foe that had sent him to cover.

Who could he be?

He had given him a sample of his marksmanship and so he kept out of sight.

Was he an Indian?

If so he was not a Sioux, for he had fired upon Sioux.

Was he a Pawnee?

If so, why had he fired upon him, a Pawnee?

He must be a white man, Pawnee Pete decided, and seeing him in the valley had mistaken him for another Sioux rushing up the hill.

But, if a skilled frontiersman, why had he not recognized him as a Pawnee, who at that time were friendly to the whites?

But Pawnee Pete had found shelter, in the haste of his search for cover, in a spot from which there was no retreat, without risking one or more shots from the hill-top.

It was behind a boulder in the canyon, and to leave it he had a hundred feet or more in either direction without a chance of shelter.

He concluded he would take a peep over and see if he saw any of the Sioux moving.

He covetted those five scalps away down in the depths of his Indian heart.

He felt sure the Sioux were all stone dead, and he would give much to "raise their hair."

He was trying to penetrate the thicket with his eyes, where he knew they lay, when a puff of smoke came, and down went his head just in time.

A bullet struck the rock squarely where his head had been, and minute particles of lead flew in a shower over him.

It told him that if the Sioux were dead, the one in ambush on the hilltop was not, and more, knew just where he was.

He felt that he would have to be very careful or he would follow the Sioux on the trail to the happy hunting-grounds.

Three minutes passed away and a rattle of firearms was heard far away.

Pawnee Pete was nearly beside himself with rage and dread combined.

He knew that the Sioux had attacked the fur-traders, and he loved a fight more than all else in the world except Sioux scalps.

He was ruled out of this fight, that was certain, he was held a prisoner behind that boulder by a secret and unseen foe, and he could not get those five Sioux scalp-locks.

The three thoughts were maddening, and Pete swore in choice English, which he had picked up from the whites.

But swearing did no good just then, and Pete sat and listened to the fighting in the valley.

His experience told him that the fur-traders were using their revolvers, and were going into the fight for close quarters.

How he would have liked to be there.

He listened attentively, forgetting for the time his unknown foe on the hilltop, and soon heard the cries of the Sioux getting fainter and fainter.

And he heard the war-cries of the trainmen growing louder and fiercer.

This told him that the Sioux were being badly worsted.

It told him that Captain Emmett had brought the Sioux to bay, and he knew enough of the train leader to feel that he was a man to show no mercy to men, red-men though they were, who were merciless to the pale-faces, women and children included.

Then came the triumphant cries of the traders, and Pawnee Pete knew just where victory had perched.

What a harvest of Sioux scalps was there!

Right near him was a good starter, too, for a string of scalps; but they might as well be off in the valley, for Pawnee Pete was hampered bodily.

What to do he did not know, and he was more excited than an Indian ever allows himself to be except in a war-dance.

He was in a frenzy, and yet he could not stand up to dance it off, as he would be surely sent after the Sioux.

What pain could not have wrung from him, his situation of inactivity did—a groan.

He groaned aloud, and dismally, and then, as silence rested out in the valley, he became calm, sat close to the boulder, lifted his pipe, and began to smoke.

This calmed him. He began to review the situation quietly, and with the patience of his people decided to await the return of the victors, to see what had become of him, the mysterious shot on the hilltop, and the dead Sioux.

They would surely look him up, and then it would be seen who the dead-shot on the hill was.

And Pawnee Pete had the patience of Job, and abided his time.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DESERTED.

I WILL now return to Charlie, at the time he went to join his prisoner, Limber Joe, and then to mount and depart on the trail of the train with all possible speed.

He had shown himself full of grit, and had not thrown his shots away when firing upon the Indians.

He had checked them for awhile at least, and as they could go below and cross, by running their horses, he did not care to be flanked.

He knew just where to go, and went at a run; but when he reached the spot where he had left the prisoner and the horses, he came to a sudden halt.

They were not there! Could that be the spot?

Yes, there were the hoof-tracks of the horses, and more: there was the horsehair lasso, fastened to the tree, and the noose that had been about the neck of his horse cut in two.

The man had cut it in some way and was gone.

If he needed further proof, it was given him just then, for he beheld, going over a distant rise, the three horses!

They were still tied together, and there was one who carried a rider.

By whatever means Limber Joe had escaped, he had not used his hands, for Charlie's keen eyes detected his arms still bound behind him.

Then he picked up the lasso.

"He cut it with his teeth," the boy decided.

For a moment he stood in silence and then, in almost a wail, the words came from the lips of the brave boy:

"He has deserted me!

"I am left all alone, and the Sioux are hot after me. Oh, what shall I do?"

That he did not break utterly down was a wonder. His indomitable will, his great pluck, alone sustained him.

But a shout from over on the river brought him to a bitter realization of his peril and almost of despair, it then seemed.

The Indians were coming, and they would come right there, following the trail of the three horses.

Then they would go on in chase of Limber Joe.

This gave him hope, for they would not know of his remaining behind, would not search for him.

Unless they saw him he would not be in great danger, and perhaps he could follow on after the train and overtake it.

Of course Limber Joe would go there and tell how the Indians had killed him, Charlie, and

then he would give the traitor guide a surprise by putting in an appearance.

Of course these thoughts flashed like lightning through Charlie's mind, and then he made his legs move equally as fast.

He ran like a deer down the hill, crossed the valley through which the trail wended its way, and darted up the opposite hillside.

He went over the ridge, down into a canyon, and seeing a high hill which he believed would be a good point of observation, he decided to climb up to it.

This he did do, and at last stood where he could obtain a fine view.

He saw the river on one side of him, the prairie stretching far away beyond, and he noted that his present position commanded the place where he had first come upon the Sioux.

He saw that it was just across a deep canyon formed of two other canyons meeting near the river.

A glance in the other direction showed him that the canyon to the left was the one the trail ran through, and that it was a short one and went on up to a valley devoid of timber.

From the hill where he then stood he commanded the ford perfectly, not over two hundred feet away.

He also commanded the canyon approach to the river.

"I'd like to have Limber Joe come back along here," he muttered.

Now his idea was that Limber Joe would go on to the train, state how he had escaped from the Indians, while he, Charlie, had been killed.

That the Indians were in pursuit would give proof to his story, and then they did not know Joe as he was in reality.

Then Joe, who would not go with the traders, as he had told him, for any pay, would start upon his return for Omaha, where he would tell how he had guided the boy so near the train and then the Indians had attacked them.

"Limber Joe must come right by here, and I'll get his horse," said Charlie firmly.

Fortunately for him he had his baversack of provisions swung over his shoulder.

In it were crackers and some German sausages he had bought in Omaha, enough to last him a couple of days if eaten sparingly.

He decided to eat sparingly, and made up his mind that he would remain there all night.

He wished the Indians to get a long way off before he took the trail.

He could rest, and in the morning take the trail.

Then, as he glanced over the way the trail led, he saw ride into sight a number of Indians.

"There are twenty-five of them, and they are following Limber Joe's trail, and going on after the train.

"I hope they'll catch him, too.

"But I am in luck, I am."

CHAPTER XXV.

CHARLIE STANDS AT BAY.

WHAT cause he had to say that he was in luck, Charlie Emmett did not say, and the reader will doubtless be unable to discover a reason for his remark, under the circumstances of his being alone, on foot, with little food and in the Indian country, many miles away from the train, his nearest hope of succor.

But Charlie had his trusty rifle, his revolvers and bowie.

Then he had plenty of ammunition for his weapons, if little for himself in the way of food.

He was young, could endure punishment and hardship without breaking down, and that the train was a day's march ahead of him, did not cause him to despair.

Of course while he was marching the train would be moving.

But he would keep up a steady tramp and try and make ten miles more a day than it did.

He could swim a river, and tow his weapons, ammunition and clothes over a log.

He could shoot some game, and he had matches with which to build a fire.

A blanket he did not have, but he could sleep close to a fire at night.

And so he plotted pluckily to yet reach the train.

When many men would have despaired, his boyish hope rose with the obstacles in his way.

The Indians having disappeared, going upon the trail of Limber Joe, Charlie decided to take a light lunch for dinner, follow it with a nap and then get about three hours' walk before daylight died, on his way after the train.

"Uncle says the trains always lie up for rest on Sunday, now I think of it, and day after to-

morrow will be the Sabbath Day, so I'll catch up then."

With this pleasing thought that he would only have to foot it a little over one day and sleep out a couple of nights, he selected a soft spot on the hill and laid down to rest.

He soon dropped to sleep, and what awoke him he cannot tell.

But he awoke with a start and sat bolt-upright.

The sun had traveled well on toward the western horizon, while he slept, and he was about to spring to his feet and start on his long tramp, when luckily he looked up the canyon.

What he saw caused his face to pale.

There were five Indians coming down the canyon.

They seemed to be following no trail, but came on at a swift walk.

Charlie was dismayed.

He had not counted upon the Indians returning.

"They are after me," he said emphatically, and he believed it.

"They've caught Limber Joe, and I'm glad of it.

"But he has told them about me, and they are chasing around after me. I wonder where the rest of them are?"

Charlie watched them with an interest born of desperation. He saw one of them point up the hill.

"Lordy! they saw me," and he drew closer down among the foliage.

Then he beheld them enter the thicket, and he began to prepare to fight.

He did not intend to be taken easily. He quickly took in the advantages of his situation, and the disadvantages of the climb the Indians would have to make.

"They'll follow the water-wash up the hill, and I'll pick them off," he muttered.

He got into a better position, glanced at his rifle, and then loosened his revolvers.

"Seven shots in the rifle and twelve in the revolvers, make nineteen, and there are but five Indians.

"Three shots apiece, and four odd ones.

"Lordy, but I ought to do it, though I have read of how, in battle, mighty few shots kill.

"Now, there they come."

He was perfectly cool now, for he had confidence in his aim.

He picked out his first warrior, waited until all had gotten out into the exposed place they had to cross, and then drew trigger.

His shot was aimed for the bared red breast of the leading warrior and found the heart.

Then followed his second, and other shots, and the next instant he was startled by the volley of rifles fired over on the ridge.

To his amazement and delight two red-skins were slain, or appeared to be, and he began to interest himself in those who had fired the fatal shots from over on the ridge.

But his hopes had a set-back when he saw an Indian slide down from that very ridge and start for the hill where he was.

"Lordy! they are Indians over there.

"But why did they fire upon their comrades, I wonder?

"I reckon it was a mistake."

So he said and then he prepared to kill Pawnee Pete.

"My! but that's a brave one," he cried as Pete advanced.

But an Indian was an Indian pure and simple to the Kentucky boy.

Choctaw, Cherokee, Comanche, Apache, Sioux or Pawnee, or even one of Fenimore Cooper's good Indians would have been game for Charlie just then, for his rifle to make the last of the Mohicans out of.

So it was that Pawnee Pete got a shot.

"Missed him! but how he jumped!"

"My! he's nimble as a grasshopper," and Charlie pulled trigger again and again, while Pawnee Pete bounded from side to side, leaped into the air and suddenly darted behind the boulder, followed by a parting shot from the boy from Kentucky at bay.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE YOUNG SCALP TAKER.

CHARLIE, in spite of his desperate situation, had smiled at the antics of Pawnee Pete in making for cover,

"He runs like old Uncle Nick the nigger parson when I caught him in our water melon patch one Sunday, on his way home from church and fired beans at him," he said and laughed over the recollection.

But his smile soon faded away as he felt that if

the Indian behind the rock came from on the ridge, of course the shots fired from there had been by red-skins.

He watched the situation carefully, keeping his eyes upon the boulder, every now and then, behind which Pawnee Pete had disappeared.

"He's got to come out of there, unless he has a rat-hole to crawl into," the boy at bay declared.

Then he heard a shout on the other side of the ridge, and the patter of moving feet, but the foliage was too dense for him to see any one.

"That sounded like a white man's voice; I only wish it was," he said, fervently.

Soon after he was startled by wild war cries. It was the Sioux charging upon the timber!

"Lordy! there's a thousand of them coming, I reckon. Well, I can't die but once, only I am not ready to go, yet.

"I wish I had gone to Sunday school more, and— Oh my! I've left my Bible in my pack.

"Maybe it would save me if I had it. But I havn't got it."

Then he was silent in his terrible suspense, every sense on the alert, when suddenly came the roar of firearms.

"My! it's a fight, sure!"

He then ran to where he had before stood and had a glimpse of the Indians on Limber Joe's trail.

What he saw surprised and pleased him.

"It's white men fighting the red-skins. I wonder if Limber Joe did go to the train and send them here to help me out. If so, I'll forgive him.

"My! but isn't that a dandy fight!

"The Indians have stopped to fight it out and the white horsemen are surrounding them.

"Oh, how I wish I was in that fight. I believe I'll go then—

"No, I forgot that red-skin behind the rock. He would just kill me, that's all. And, too, maybe there's more of them over the ridge!

"I'll wait and see how that fight ends.

"My! they are at it like cats, tooth, claw and yell—whew! but that's what I call Indian-fighting for sure!

"I'd cheer the white horsemen, but that red grasshopper behind the rock would fire a bullet at me if he knew just where I was.

"As I live—there's his ugly head peering over the rock! How are you, red-skin!

"Now I'll do a little shooting."

As he spoke Charlie took good aim at Pawnee Pete's head and fired.

The result is known.

The boy felt sure that he had killed the Pawnee.

"I got that Indian, sure. How could I have missed him, when I had a rest on that limb and a dead aim.

"Goodness! if I have to stay here to-night I'll see red ghosts in that canyon, by the dozen; but, I won't stay, for I'll go over in the valley yonder, for white men must be friends.

"The fight is over now, for, just hear the men yell!

"Yes, they have won the victory and the red-skins are just dead, that's all.

"Now I'll see to my red-skin foes.

"Uncle told me no Indian was a dead Indian until he was scalped, and that the white scouts followed the example of the red-skins and scalped their dead foes.

"I wonder if I must scalp them?

"I guess I'd better, for Uncle Emmett told me that when anybody came into camp with an Indian story, of how he had killed red-skins, the boys would ask him to show up the scalp or shut up.

"I'll have to get the scalps, though I don't like to do it.

"Oh! but won't I have news to write to crippled Bennie!

"He'll be awful mad because he's lame and can't come West; but maybe I won't get a chance to write, either, for I may be scalped myself.

"But, here goes!"

With this the boy crept out of his hiding-place, and slipped down the hill.

He halted at the edge of the foliage, where he would have to cross the open space. He dared not venture for awhile, and searched the ridge and canyon closely, but at last made up his mind to make the venture, and leaped down the hill, in a swift dash.

No shot came; no yell was heard; and he brought up in the foliage almost upon the body of the Indian he had killed.

There lay the other forms, too, stopped in their rolling down hill by the thick growth of trees.

The venturesome boy gave a shudder at sight

of them, and then he saw that three of them had been fairly riddled with bullets.

"These two are mine," he muttered. "I don't wish to claim what I didn't kill, but I'll take the scalps of these two, and then go down in the canyon to the rock and get the red grasshopper's scalp, for that, too, is mine."

"Uncle Emmett showed me just how to do it!" he continued, after awhile, "and Limber Joe told me, too."

"Let me see, it's this way," and Charlie took his first lesson in scalping, an act which gave him a name that has clung to him all his life, and by which he is still known upon the border, the name of "The Young Scalp-Taker."

The "hair-lifting" having been accomplished, Charlie hastened on down the hill, his rifle in hand, and crossing the canyon he ran up to the rock behind which Pawnee Pete had taken refuge.

But, Pawnee Pete was gone!

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

PAWNEE PETE had experienced such a terror that he could not again risk his head over the top of the rock; but having finished smoking his pipe, he made an effort to reconnoiter again.

He did so, however, by lying flat upon his face and peering around the edge of the rock, close to the ground.

What he saw seemed to surprise him, and he quickly reached for his rifle.

But he did not make use of it, and gave a grunt of intense surprise.

"Pale-face boy!

"He kill heap, make big chief!

"Ugh!"

What Pawnee Pete saw that surprised him, the reader can surmise was Charlie, on his way down the hill.

From where he lay upon the ground, the Indian could see several of the bodies of the dead Sioux, under the foliage.

He beheld Charlie go to them, and then, bending over, scalp one.

This was enough for the Pawnee.

He would not fire upon a white boy, and he would not remain there to be scalped by a juvenile Kentuckian: so he took advantage of Charlie being interested in his *debut* in scalping, and set out for the foot of the ridge at a speed that would have distanced a deer.

He reached the shelter of the trees with a mighty bound, and then climbed up the steep hillside to the top of the ridge.

Arriving there he looked pleased. He knew that Captain Emmett had come back to see what had become of his nephew.

Pete could tell him.

That it was other than the Kentucky Tenderfoot, the Pawnee had not the remotest idea.

So he gathered himself for another dash, and ran down to the edge of the timber, where the fur-traders were assembling and bringing in their dead comrades for burial.

Others were digging a grave out in a hollow in the valley, in which the Indians were to be sepulchered.

The captain, who had had much experience with wounds, unheeding his own, was looking to his wounded men.

He had just gladly noted that they were to be spared the horrors of having been shot with poisoned arrows.

While the graves were being dug by the men who had not participated in the fight in the valley, the captain was dressing the wounds.

He had bandaged up the last one, then had looked to himself, and with the aid of Girard, the guide, when Pawnee Pete was seen coming like a race-horse down the slope.

"Ah, men, there comes Pawnee Pete, and he has news.

"I guess we have more fighting to do, so be ready," commanded the captain.

"Maybe he knows who it was fired from the hill-top, cap'n," suggested Girard.

"Well, I hope so, and whoever it was, he was a brave fellow and a crack shot.

"How he did make Pawnee Pete skip!" laughed Captain Emmett. "Maybe he's after him now?"

A moment after Pawnee Pete came up. He had run hard and was panting.

"Well, Pete, what is it?" demanded Captain Emmett, quickly.

"Big Chief, Pawnee Pete have found boy!"

"My God! dead?" and the stout-hearted Emmett turned deadly pale.

"No! no dead! Heap too much alive! He mos' kill Pawnee Pete," was the reproachful response of the Indian.

"You don't mean it?" cried the captain excitedly.

"Oh, yes, Pawnee Pete talk straight. Pale-face boy over yonder in canyon. Him shoot from hill-top, and kill Sioux.

"He make big chief—he nearly kill Pawnee Pete very bad!"

"See here, Pawnee Pete, if you are telling it straight I'll give you a cool one hundred dollars.

"Where is the boy?"

"Over in canyon scalping Sioux him shoot. Boy big chief!"

"No, no, it is no boy."

"He boy, all same. Pawnee Pete know."

"You are sure?"

"He so old," and Pete held his hand nearly up to his shoulder to designate Charlie's height.

"But, he cannot be my nephew, for he's a tenderfoot from Kentucky."

"Ugh! He no tenderfoot—heap big man for small boy."

"He fight bad, and scalp Sioux—scalp Pawnee Pete for Sioux if he stay there—he don't know Pawnee from Sioux and shoot at me—nearly kill—ugh!"

"Say, Pete, you tell a pretty straight story. Here is my horse, so come with me. Girard, you come, too, and two more of you men, while the rest of you go on with your sad work."

Captain Emmett was weak from loss of blood, but, mounting his horse, followed Pawnee Pete, while the others walked.

They reached the top of the ridge, and the captain, dismounting, went to the edge to peek over down in the valley.

Pawnee Pete and the others were looking, too; but their eyes were turned toward the hill where the Sioux had rolled after being shot.

Suddenly, however, Pawnee Pete started and grasped the arm of Captain Emmett, while he cried, excitedly:

"See! there white boy, by rock! He looking for Pawnee Pete! Want him scalp! See! boy got Sioux scalp! Ugh!"

And there, indeed, was Charlie Emmett, and Pete was right, for he was looking for the Pawnee.

One glance at the boy and Captain Emmett knew him, and he said, in a voice that trembled:

"It's my tenderfoot boy from Kentucky, sure as I live!"

Then, raising his voice, he called out:

"Ho, Charlie! You little rascal, what are you doing so far from home?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DASHING CHARLIE.

AT the first sound of sound of Captain Emmett's voice Charlie made a bound for cover, on the other side of the rock.

But he knew the voice almost instantly, and taking off his hat waved it around his head while he shouted back:

"Hurrah! I've found you at last, Uncle Emmett!"

"I've found you, rather, my boy."

"But come up the hill here, for I wish to see you and know what this means, for you have cost the lives of three splendid fellows this day, and caused us to wipe out utterly a band of Indians."

"Come up here, my Kentucky boy, and report how it is that you don't happen to be a tenderfoot out here on the border."

Thus urged, Charlie started, but stopped to say:

"There are three Sioux over on the hill yonder, Uncle Emmett, that have not been scalped, and you told me no Indian was dead until he was scalped."

"Three, did you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"There were five of them."

"Oh, I scalped two, for I killed them."

"You?"

"Yes, sir, from up on the top of the hill."

"They were coming up to attack me and so I shot two, and I took their scalps."

"The dickens you say?"

"Yes, sir; but some one from on the ridge then fired on the others; but as I did not kill them I would not take their scalps."

At this Captain Emmett burst forth with a loud laugh, while Girard and the two other men cheered wildly at the boy's pluck.

"I did think I killed another Indian here, behind this rock, and came for his scalp, but he was gone."

Girard and the others just shouted to hear this, while Captain Emmett said:

"Pawnee Pete, you had a close call."
 "Yes, heap close."
 "Well, Charlie will be your best friend when he knows you."
 "Shoot at Pawnee Pete all same."
 "He thought you were a Sioux."
 "Me Pawnee."
 "Yes, but he don't know."
 "Ho, Charlie!"
 "Yes, Uncle Emmett."
 "The Indian you shot at there behind the rock is Pawnee Pete, my best friend, and an Indian scout."
 "He was with us here when we fired on the Sioux, and was going for their scalps when you shot at him."
 "I'm awful sorry, uncle, and I'll make it up with him, and he can get the three scalps there now," and Charlie stepped upon the ridge, and grasped his uncle's hand.

The strong man's voice trembled as he greeted the boy, and he turned quickly and said:

"Here is Pawnee Pete, Charlie, and you must be the best of friends."

"I will, uncle," and Charlie grasped Pawnee Pete's hand, and the breach was healed.

"And these are my pards, Charlie, and there are more of them down the hill, yonder, all come to help you, though we feared you had been killed."

"Go after the scalps, Pawnee Pete, and I'll send a couple of men around to the canyon to bury the bodies."

"Now, my boy, we'll go down yonder," and when we have laid our dead comrades and the Indians under the ground we will hear your story."

The party moved down the slope, the captain walking now and his horse following.

When he reached the group of men he said:

"My friends, this is my nephew, Charlie Emmett, whom we expected to find dead, but who, instead, has been slaying Indians."

"Bravo for Dashing Charlie!"

"Three cheers for Dashing Charlie!" cried Girard the guide, and the men gave them with a will, thus christening the lad by the name he was afterward known.

Charlie politely raised his hat, while his face lighted up with pride.

But he kept close to his uncle's side, at the burial of the three brave men, and over whom Captain Emmett recited a part of the Service for the Dead.

Then the men joined in as one of their number in a fine tenor voice started the hymn:

"Rock of ages, cleft for me."

Back against the hills rolled the chorus of voices in many an echo, and the men all stood over the graves of their dead comrades with uncovered heads and sad mien.

At last the graves were filled in, and a camping-place was sought and found upon the riverbank, where the horses found good feeding.

Camp-fires were built and the party began to cook supper, for among the belongings of the Indians had been found a fat young antelope, whose juicy steaks gave a most appetizing odor as they broiled upon the hot coals.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DASHING CHARLIE'S STORY.

THOUGH there was little dread of Indians molesting them that night, Captain Emmett was not a man to be one whit less cautious, and therefore two sentinels were placed, from among ten unwounded men, while Girard and Pawnee Pete were to relieve each other in doing scouting duty around the camp.

Pawnee Pete had returned with the scalps of the three Sioux over in the canyon, and then hastened with all speed to the burial spot of the others out in the valley.

A Sioux scalp was not to be missed, and Pawnee Pete had an idea of one day becoming a great chief among his people, and what better foundation could he have for popularity than to add to his string of half a dozen scalps, the two dozen more that he had the opportunity of securing?

He was so elated at his good fortune that he told Girard he would scout around all night long if he wished.

Though their wounds were painful, none of them were serious, and when they were dressed again the men congregated about the camp-fire to learn the strange story of how Dashing Charlie Emmett had escaped the Sioux.

"Now, Charlie, you must satisfy my curiosity and tell me how it is that I find you away off here in borderland, when I left you in Kentucky

a month ago, and I was not allowed to bring you along with me?"

"Did they relent and let you follow me, supposing you would find me in Louisville?"

"No, Uncle Emmett," and Dashing Charlie's face flushed.

But he soon frankly said:

"The truth is, sir, I ran away from home."

"Ah! ran away from home—that is bad!"

"It would have been worse if I had stayed, uncle, for I got into trouble with Teacher Stevens, and got punished all around, so I just got on the horse you gave me, took my money and weapons, and put out."

"Tell us about it, Charlie," said his uncle, with a smile, for he knew the teacher.

Then Charlie told his story, of how he had volunteered to take crippled Bennie's whipping, and that it did not save the poor boy.

How he had avenged himself upon the teacher by letting him fall into the brook and then fishing him out, he told to the great amusement of the men, who applauded loudly.

Then came the story of how he prepared for his flight, and had planned to get a good start, riding at night, and lying by in the daytime.

He was again applauded for his cunning in striking for St. Louis instead of Louisville, and all that happened there he made known.

"Charlie, you are a brick," said Captain Emmett, with enthusiasm, and the men affirmed the remark.

The selling of his horse, and purchase of an outfit, with his interesting trip up the Missouri with his good friends, the pilots, all were made known.

Then came the story of his discovering his uncle had left Omaha, and how he had hired Limber Joe as guide so as to overtake him.

All felt the deepest interest now, and as he told of Barney's following, and how he had suspected treachery and plotted against it, killing his intended assassin and capturing Limber Joe, the men yelled as wildly as they had in the charge on the Indians in the afternoon, and Pawnee Bill came rushing in to see if the camp had been surprised.

Charlie next made known how Limber Joe had played 'possum, and how he had given him a smell of hartshorn, and afterward brought him to by the cry of Indians.

The men laughed heartily at this, but their brows darkened when he told how, when he went up to the bank to check the Sioux at the ford by a few shots, Limber Joe had deserted him.

What had followed up to the time of the hearing of his uncle's voice calling to him, he told, and it was well Pawnee Pete was not there when he described him as the Red Grasshopper, while running from his shots.

"Well, Charlie, I can safely say you are no tenderfoot on the border, after the experience you have had.

"It has been a brave struggle, and you have shown yourself an untiring trailer to find me, and a boy of indomitable nerve.

"You have had a hard fight for life of it, and when we reach camp to-morrow, we will try Limber Joe by border court-martial, and see what the result will be.

"Now, as we are all tired out, let us turn in, and to-morrow we will make an early start back for the train."

And ten minutes after, the camp was as silent as the graves of the dead down the hillside.

CHAPTER XXX.

LIMBER JOE'S FATE.

WHEN the party under Captain Emmett returned to camp, Charlie was not with them.

At the request of his uncle he had hung back out of sight, until Limber Joe could see that he was not along.

Captain Emmett had a motive for this which will appear further on.

They rode into camp—those three gallant men, and their appearance indicated that they had met the enemy. At once they were greeted with ringing cheers from their comrades.

Doctor Chalmers immediately began the work of looking after the wounded, beginning first with the captain, and not ceasing his ministrations until he had dressed the wounds the horses had received.

The five Indian ponies had been brought back, along with the weapons and some of the traps of the warriors.

"Well, Doc, how is the prisoner?" asked Captain Emmett.

"All safe, and he has about talked Dan Malone into believing in his innocence."

"Has he?"

"He has, indeed, for a fact."

"Well, we shall soon see how innocent he is—the traitor! But where is he?"

"In the camp yonder."

"I want him in here, in your tent where he cannot see any one coming into camp, so bring him here and you keep him engaged until I call you."

The doctor did as directed. Then Pawnee Pete was sent back on the trail to come in with Dashing Charlie, who was waiting alone, mounted on his uncle's horse, with orders to make a run for camp if he saw a red-skin.

But, Charlie did not run at sight of Pawnee Pete, and the two came in together, the Indian taking him to the tent of Captain Emmett unseen by Limber Joe, who was with Doc Chalmers.

Then the captain had the bugle sound "assembly," and the men all hurried to the headquarters tent, grouping themselves about it.

Doc Chalmers was then sent for, and with him came Limber Joe.

The prisoner had a more confident look, for he had been told that the men had met the redskins, had been badly whipped, and no trace of his companions had been found.

"Limber Joe, what is your real name?" asked Captain Emmett, quietly.

"I dunno if it's any o' your business, cap'n."

"Well, I thought you might wish me to send word to your kinsfolk how you had ended your life."

"What does yer mean?" and Limber Joe became very pale.

"I mean that I charge you with having taken the life of the boy you started from Omaha with."

"It's a lie!" he shouted.

"Well, here are all his traps. You brought them in with you."

"He was kilt."

"Who killed him?"

"Ther Injins, in course."

"It is not so."

"I says it is."

"Will you swear to it?"

"Yas, I will."

"You saw the boy killed?"

"I did."

"There was no doubt about his being dead?"

"I says no."

"Do you believe in ghosts, Limber Joe?"

"Waal, I dunno. Sometimes I believes I has seen one, and then maybe it war only a bad dream."

"Well, I am going to show you a ghost."

"Charlie Emmett, appear before this man who swears that you were killed!" and, as Captain Emmett spoke, Dashing Charlie stepped out of the tent and confronted Limber Joe and the others.

Limber Joe uttered one long wail of woe and staggered backward, as though about to fall.

"Don't be so scared, Limber Joe, for I am not the ghost you tried to make me!" Dashing Charlie assured, in a pleasant way.

Then Captain Emmett spoke, and his voice was stern, his face severe.

"Men, I wish you to hear the story of this man's crime. I wish my nephew to tell you all the story of his leaving home and coming after me. It will interest you, and you will know what this man, Limber Joe, has done.

"I will show you two proofs of his guilt, too, in his handwriting, and the traps of his pard whom he bribed to kill the lad."

"Now, Charlie, tell my friends here your whole story, neglecting nothing."

Charlie at once related his adventures in a voice that all heard.

There was not the slightest tinge of bravado, for all was told in a modest way, and his statements revealed the truth to the men.

When they had heard all—when Charlie had stepped back out of view, at the ringing cheers the men gave "Dashing Charlie, the Young Scalp-Taker," all eyes turned upon Limber Joe, the traitor guide.

Joe was the hue of a corpse, and his whole frame was quivering with fright.

"Men," and the voice of Captain Emmett was commanding, "Men, you have heard, and the question is: Do you believe this boy's story?"

"We do!"

The words were uttered with a perfect roar, and Captain Emmett continued:

"You believe this man guilty?"

"We do!"

"And that he is deserving of punishment for his dastardly crimes?"

"Yes."

"What shall that punishment be?"

"Hang him up now!" cried a voice, and it was Dan Malone who spoke.

At once his words were echoed by the crowd, and then Captain Emmett turned to the prisoner, who had sunk down and was leaning against a tree.

"Limber Joe, you have heard the finding of this border court-martial, and that you are to be sentenced to death. I now pronounce sentence upon you, and it is that you are to be hanged at sunset to-day, and may Heaven have mercy upon your guilty soul."

"Girard, take the man in your keeping."

The guide stepped forward to obey, but started back as he called:

"Doctor, see here!"

Doctor Dick Chalmers quickly stepped forward, and knelt by the side of the doomed man.

He felt his pulse, then bent his ear over the heart.

All looked on in deathlike silence.

At last the doctor turned to the leader and said:

"Captain Emmett, the man is dead. He died of fright."

"Not a word was spoken until the captain broke the silence with:

"You are sure, Chalmers?"

"Perfectly."

"There must be no mistake."

"There is none."

"The man is dead."

"So be it."

"Girard?"

"Yes, captain."

"Take a detail of men and bury the man at sunset, and outside of the limits of the camp."

CONCLUSION.

The traitor guide was buried, and after a rest over Sunday the fur-traders' train pulled out again on its way further into the great Northwest.

Charlie Emmett was delighted at being along, and his uncle was most happy at having him with him—his mind being at ease when Charlie spoke of his letters home from St. Louis and Omaha, and to prevent anxiety regarding him, had implied that Captain Emmett was just starting upon his expedition.

Upon the adventures of Dashing Charlie on this expedition we will not now touch. They form the incidents of a wild, exciting and truthful story, which is to be related in due time, and will seem more like romance than reality.

The real scenes of wild life in the far West in past years have often seemed like fiction when correctly chronicled, and that there is no man now living who has led a stranger career of romance and daring adventure than has Dashing Charlie, the Young Scalper, the record of his deeds will show.

THE END.

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